

ARGOSY

OCT.
20

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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Weird and
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Handsomely engraved 18K Solid White Gold wedding ring, 5 genuine blue white diamonds. \$2.38 a month.



CA7 **\$36⁷⁵**
New lady's friendship ring, 18K Solid White Gold, 3 perfectly matched, blue white diamonds. \$2.98 a mo.



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CA11 **\$47⁵⁰**
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CA12-The "Madam Jenny"
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CA1 **\$42⁵⁰**
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CA4 **\$48⁵⁰**
Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched, finest quality blue white diamonds. 18K Solid White Gold mounting. \$3.96 a mo.



CA5 **\$75⁰⁰**
The "Bordeaux" 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring, hand carved floral design. Finest grade, blue white diamond. \$6.16 a month.

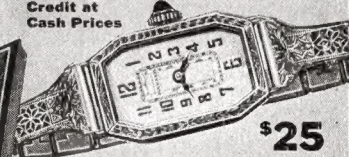


CA8 **\$57⁵⁰**
The "Mayfair" 18K Solid White Gold, beautifully hand pierced lady's mounting. Finest grade, genuine blue white diamond. \$4.71 a month.



CA9 **\$75⁰⁰**
Artistically hand engraved 18K solid white gold, newest style lady's mounting. 3 fiery first quality, blue white diamonds. \$6.16 a month.

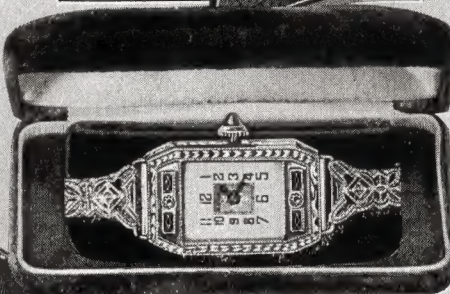
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CA14-The "Princess Pat", 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD, engraved case. Accurate, dependable. 15 jewel movement. Genuine "WRISTACRAT" flexible bracelet. \$2.00 a mo.



CA17-Gents combination, nationally advertised, Elgin or Waltham thin model movement. 12 size, engraved octagon design, green gold filled case. Guaranteed 20 years. Complete with knife and chain. **\$22⁵⁰** \$1.79 a mo.



CA16-Ultra fashionable, diamond wrist watch, hand engraved 14-K SOLID WHITE GOLD case, 15 ruby and sapphire jewelled movement. 2 blue white diamonds, 4 French blue sapphires. Genuine "WRISTACRAT" bracelet; patented safety clasp. \$2.79 a month. **\$34⁵⁰**

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The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

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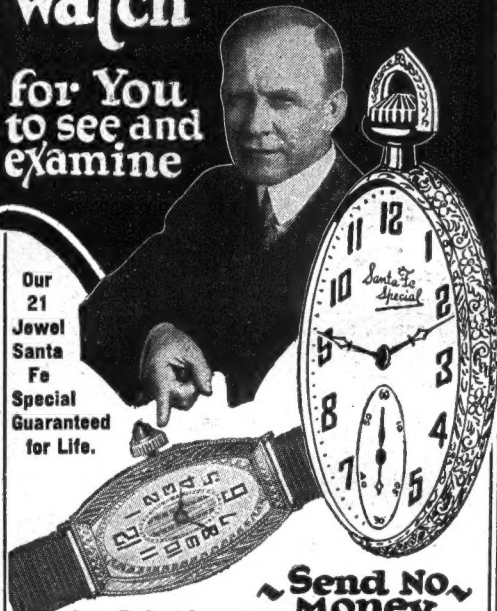
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Saved

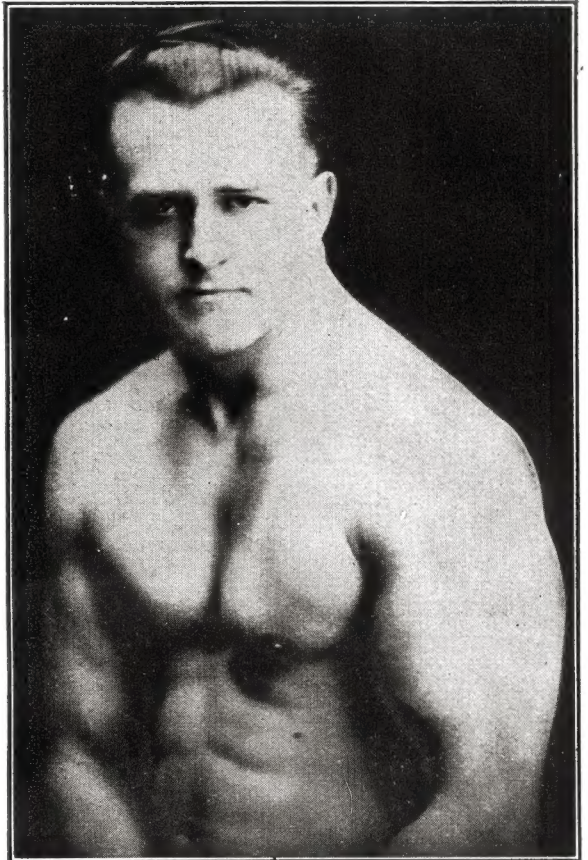
Thank your lucky stars you have another man inside of you. He's the human dynamo. He fills you full of pep and ambition. He keeps you alive—on fire. He urges you on in your daily tasks. He makes you strive for bigger and better things to do. He makes you crave for life and strength. He teaches you that the weak fall by the wayside, but the strong succeed. He shows you that exercise builds live tissue—live tissue is muscle—muscle means strength—strength is power. Power brings success! That's what you want, and gosh darn your old hide! You're going to get it.

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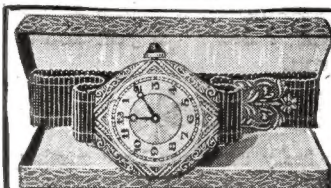
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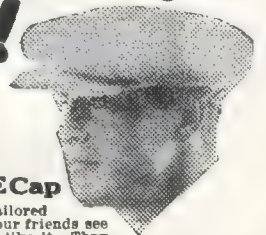
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ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME 198

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1928

NUMBER 5

Rain Magic

By **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

Author of "On All Six," "The Mob Buster," etc.



"I'm Kk-Kk, the
keeper of the gold ledge," she said.

*From the deck of a ship the sea snatched him
and hurled him into a weird adventure
and romance such as few men experience*

Novelette—Complete

FACT OR FICTION

"RAIN MAGIC" is a most unusual story; it is one of those tales that leave something in the reader's mind to think about—something on which his opinion is as good as any one else's—as good as that of the author himself.

From the middle of the California desert it came to us—a story of the far places of tropical Africa. The postmark interested

us; the opening scene on the desert intrigued us; the indefinable feeling of reality which cloaks the weird and unusual incidents fascinated us. So much so that we wrote to the author requesting that he tell us something of the history of the story.

Mr. Gardner's most remarkable letter is printed in full in Argonotes. Read the story, then turn to the author's strange account of its origin. Then, perhaps, you,

too, will close the magazine and sit back with Mr. Gardner and with us—and wonder. Wonder how much of it is fact and how much fiction—wonder how much truth lies behind an adventure so incredible.

THE EDITORS.

CHAPTER I.

THROUGH THE BREAKERS.

NO, no—no more coffee. Thanks. Been asleep, eh? Well, don't look so worried about it. Mighty nice of you to wake me up. What day is it?

Thursday, eh? I've been asleep two days then—oh, it is? Then it's been nine days. That's more like it.

It was the rain, you see. I tried to get back to my tent, but the storm came up too fast. It's the smell of the damp green things in a rain. The doctors tell me it's auto-hypnosis. They're wrong. M'Gamba told me I'd always be that way when I smelled the jungle smell. It's the sleeping sickness in my veins. That's why I came to the desert. It doesn't rain out here more than once or twice a year.

When it does rain the jungle smells come back and the sleeping sickness gets me. Funny how my memory comes back after those long sleeps. It was the drugged bread, *king-kec* they called it; but the language ain't never been written down. Sort of a graduated monkey talk it was.

It's hot here, come over in the shadow of this Joshuay palm. That's better.

Ever been to sea? No? Then you won't understand.

IT was down off the coast of Africa. Anything can happen off the coast of Africa. After the storms, the Sahara dust comes and paints the rigging white. Yes, sir, three hundred miles out to sea I've seen it. And for a hundred miles you can get the smell of the jungles. When the wind's right.

It was an awful gale. You don't see 'em like it very often. We tried to let go the deckload of lumber, but the

chains jammed. The Dutchmen took to the riggin' jabberin' prayers. They were a weak-kneed lot. It was the Irishman that stayed with it. He was a cursin' devil.

He got busy with an ax. The load had listed and we was heeled over to port. The Dutchmen in the riggin' prayin', an' the Irishman down on the lumber cursin'. A wave took him over and then another wave washed him back again. I seen it with my own eyes. He didn't give up. He just cursed harder than ever. And he got the chains loose, too. The deck load slid off and she righted.

But it was heavy weather and it got worse. The sky was just a mass of whirlin' wind and the water came over until she didn't get rid of one wave before the next bunch of green water was on top of her.

The rudder carried away. I thought everything was gone, but she lived through it. We got blown in, almost on top of the shore. When the gale died we could see it. There was a species of palm stickin' up against the sky, tall trees they were, and below 'em was a solid mass of green stuff, and it stunk. The whole thing was decayin' an' steamin' just like the inside of a rotten, damp log.

The old man was a bad one. It was a hell ship an' no mistake. I'd been shanghaied, an' I wanted back. Thirty pound I had in my pocket when I felt the drink rockin' my head. I knew then, but it was too late. The last I remembered was the grinnin' face of the tout smilin' at me through a blue haze.

The grub was rotten. The old man was a devil when he was sober, an' worse when he was drunk. The Irish mate cursed all the time, cursed and worked. Between 'em they drove the men, drove us like sheep.

The moon was half full. After the storm the waves were rollin' in on a good sea breeze. There wasn't any whitecaps. The wind just piled the water up until the breakers stood four-

teen feet high before they curled an' raced up the beach.

But the breakers didn't look so bad from the deck of the ship. Not in the light of the half moon they didn't. We'd been at work on the rudder an' there was a raft over the side. I was on watch, an' the old man was drunk, awful drunk. I don't know when the idea came to me, but it seemed to have always been there. It just popped out in front when it got a chance.

I was halfway down the rope before I really knew what I was doin'. My bare feet hit the raft an' my sailor knife was workin' on the rope before I had a chance to even think things over.

But I had a chance on the road in, riding the breakers. I had a chance even as soon as the rope was cut. The old man came and stood on the rail, lookin' at the weather, too drunk to know what he was looking at, but cockin' his bleary eye at the sky outa habit.

He'd have seen me, drunk as he was, if he'd looked down, but he didn't. If he'd caught me then I'd have been flayed alive. He'd have sobered up just special for the occasion.

I drifted away from him. The moon was on the other side of the hull, leavin' it just a big, black blotch o' shadow, ripplin' on the water, heavin' up into the sky. Then I drifted out of the shadow and into golden water. The moon showed over the top of the boat, an' the sharks got busy.

I'd heard they never struck at a man while he was strugglin'. Maybe it's true. I kept movin', hands and feet goin'. The raft was only an inch or two outa water, an' it was narrow. The sharks cut through the water like hiss-in' shadows. I was afraid one of 'em would grab a hand or a foot an' drag me down, but they didn't. I could keep the rest of me outa the water, but not my hands an' feet. I had to paddle with 'em to get into shore before the wind and tide changed. I didn't want to be left floatin' around there with no sail, nor food; nothin' but sharks.

From the ship the breakers looked easy an' lazylike. When I got in closer I saw they were monsters. They'd rise up an' blot out all the land, even the tops of the high trees. Just before they'd break they'd send streamers of spray, high up in the heavens. Then they'd come down with a crash.

But I couldn't turn back. The sharks and the wind and the tide were all against me, and the old man would have killed me.

I rode in on a couple of breakers, and then the third one broke behind me. The raft an' me, an' maybe the sharks all got mixed up together. My feet struck the sand, but they wouldn't stay there.

The strong undertow was cuttin' the sand out from under me. I could feel it racin' along over my toes, an' then I started back an' down.

The undertow sucked me under another wave, somethin' alive brushed against my back, an' then tons o' water came down over me. That time I was on the bottom an' I rolled along with sand an' water bein' pumped into my innards. I thought it was the end, but there was a lull in the big ones, an' a couple o' little ones came an' rolled me up on the beach.

I WAS more dead than alive. The water had made me groggy, an' I was sore from the pummelin' I'd got. I staggered up the strip of sand an' into the jungle.

A little ways back was a cave, an' into the cave I flopped. The water oozed out of my insides like from a soaked sponge. My lungs an' stomach an' ears were all full. I tried to get over a log an' let 'er drain out, but I was too weak. I felt everything turnin' black to me.

The next thing I knew it was gettin' dawn an' shadowy shapes were flittin' around. I thought they was black angels an' they were goin' to smother me. They stunk with a musty smell, an' they settled all over me.

Then I could feel the blood runnin'

over my skin. It got a little lighter, an' I could see. I was in a bat cave an' the bats were comin' back. They'd found me an' were settlin' on me in clouds, suckin' blood.

I tried to fight 'em off, but it was like fightin' a fog. Sometimes I'd hit 'em, but they'd just sail through the air, an' I couldn't hurt 'em. All the time, they was flutterin' their wings an' lookin' for a chance to get more blood.

I'd got the weight of 'em off, though, an' I staggered out of the cave. They followed me for a ways; but when I got out to where it was gettin' light they went back in the cave. It gets light quick down there in the tropics, an' the light hurt their eyes.

I rolled into the sand an' went to sleep.

When I woke up I heard marchin' feet. It sounded like an army. They was comin' regular like, slow, unhurried, deliberate. It made the chills come up my spine just to hear the *boom, boom, boom* of those feet.

I crawled deeper into the sand under the shadows of the overhangin' green stuff. Naked men an' women filed out onto the beach.

I watched 'em.

Chocolate-colored they were, an' they talked a funny, squeaky talk. I found afterward some of the words was Fanti and some was a graduated monkey talk. Fanti ain't never been written down.

It's one of the Tshi languages. The Ashantis an' the Fantis an' one or two other tribes speak branches o' the same lingo. But these people spoke part Fanti an' part graduated monkey talk.

An' among 'em was a monkey-man. He was a funny guy. There was coarse hair all over him, an' he had a stub of a tail. His big toes weren't set like mine, but they was twisted like a foot thumb.

No, I didn't notice the toes at the time. I found that out later, while he was sittin' on a limb gettin' ready to shoot a poisoned arrow at me. I

thought every minute was my last, an' then was when I noticed the way his foot thumbs wrapped around the limb. Funny how a man will notice little things when he's near death.

Anyway, this tribe came down an' marched into the water, men, women, an' children. They washed themselves up to the hips, sort of formal, like it was a ceremony. The rest of them they didn't get water on at all. They came out an' rubbed sort of an oil on their arms, chests, an' faces.

CHAPTER II.

LIFE OR DEATH.

FINALLY they all went away, all except a woman an' a little kid.

The woman was lookin' for somethin' in the water—fish, maybe. The kid was on a rock about eight feet away, a little shaver he was, an' he had a funny pot-belly. I looked at him an' I looked at her.

I was sick an' I was hungry, an' I was bleedin' from the bats. The smell of the jungle was in my lungs, so I couldn't tell whether the air was full of jungle or whether I was breathin' in jungle stuff with just a little air. It's a queer sensation. Unless you've been through it you wouldn't understand.

Well, I felt it was everything or nothin'. The woman couldn't kill me, an' the kid couldn't. An' I had to make myself known an' get somethin' to eat.

I straightened out of the sand.

"Hello," said I.

The kid was squattin' on his haunches. He didn't seem to jump. He just flew through the air an' he sailed right onto his mother's back. His hands clung to her shoulders an' his head pressed tight against her skin, the eyes rollin' at me, but the head never movin'.

The mother made three jumps right up the sand, an' then she sailed into the air an' caught the branch of a tree. The green stuff was so thick that I lost

sight of 'em both right there. I could hear a lot of jabberin' monkey talk in the trees, an' then I heard the squeaky voice of the woman talkin' back to the monkeys. I could tell the way she was goin' by the jabber of monkey talk.

No, I can't remember words of monkey talk. I never got so I could talk to the monkeys. But the people did. I am goin' to tell you about that. I'm explainin' about the sleepin' sickness, an' about how the memories come back to me after I've been asleep.

Maybe they're dreams, but maybe they ain't. If they're dreams, how comes it that when I got to Cape Coast Castle I couldn't remember where I'd been? They brought me in there on stretchers, an' nobody knows how far they'd brought me. They left me in the dead o' night. But the next mornin' there were the tracks, an' they were tracks like nobody there had ever seen before.

There's strange things in Africa, an' this was when I was a young blood, remember that. I was an upstandin' youngster, too. I'd tackle anything, even the west coast of Africa on a raft, an' the Fanti warriors; but I'm comin' to that directly.

Well, the woman ran away, an' the monkeys came. They stuck around on the trees an' jabbered monkey talk at me. I wished I'd been like the woman an' could have talked to 'em. But the monkeys ain't got so many words. There's a lot of it that's just tone stuff. It was the ants that could speak, but they rubbed feelers together.

Oh, yes, there was ants, great, woolly ants two inches long, ants that built houses out of sticks. They built 'em thirty feet high, an' some of the sticks was half an inch round an' six or eight inches long. They had the ants guardin' the gold ledge, an' nobody except Kk-Kk, the feeder, an' the goldsmith could come near there.

The goldsmith was nothin' but a slave, anyway. They'd captured him

from a slaver that went ashore. The others died of the fever, but the natives gave the goldsmith some medicine that cured him. After that he couldn't get sick. They could have done the same by me, too, but the monkey-man was my enemy. He wanted Kk-Kk for himself.

Finally I heard the tramp of feet again, an' the warriors of the tribe came out. They had spears an' little bows with long arrows. The arrows were as thin as a pencil. They didn't look like they'd hurt anything, but there was a funny color on the points, a sort of shimmering something.

I found out afterward that was where they'd coated 'em with poison an' baked the poison into the wood. One scratch with an arrow like that an' a man or a beast would die. But it didn't hurt the flesh none for eatin'. Either of man or beast it didn't. They ate 'em both.

I SAW it was up to me to make a speech. The men all looked serious an' dignified. That is, they all did except the monkey-man. He capered around on the outside. His balance didn't seem good on his two feet, so he'd stoop over an' use the backs of his knuckles to steady himself. He could hitch along over the ground like the wind. His arms were long, long an' hairy, an' the inside of his palms was all wrinkled, thick an' black.

Anyhow, I made a speech.

I told 'em that I was awful tough, an' that I was thin, an' maybe the bat bites had poisoned me, so I wouldn't advise 'em to cook me. I told 'em I was a friend an' I didn't come to bother 'em, but to get away from the big ship that was layin' offshore.

I thought they understood me, because some of 'em was lookin' at the ship. But I found out afterward they didn't. They'd seen the ship, an' they'd seen me, an' they saw the dried salt water on my clothes, an' they figgered it out for themselves.

I finished with my speech. I didn't expect 'em to clap their hands, because they had spears an' bows, but I thought maybe they'd smile. They was a funny bunch, all gathered around there in a circle, grave an' naked like. An' they all had three scars on each side of their cheek bones. It made 'em look tough.

Then the monkey-man gave a sort of a leap an' lit in the trees, an' the monkeys came around and jabbered, an' he jabbered, an' somehow I thought he was tellin' the monkeys about me. Maybe he was. I never got to know the monkey talk.

An' then from the jungle behind me I heard a girl's voice, an' it was speakin' good English.

"Be silent and I shall speak to my father," she said.

You can imagine how I felt hearin' an English voice from the jungle that way, an' knowin' it was a girl's voice. But I knew she wasn't a white woman. I could tell that by the sound of the voice, sort of the way the tongue didn't click against the roof of the mouth, but the lips made the speech soft like.

An' then there was a lot of squeaky talk from the jungles back of me.

There was silence after that talk, an' then I heard the girl's voice again.

"They've gone for the goldsmith. He'll talk to you."

I didn't see who had gone, an' I didn't know who the goldsmith was. I turned around an' tried to see into the jungle, but all I could see was leaves, trunks an' vine stems. There was a wispy blue vapor that settled all around an' overhead the air was white way way up, white with Sahara dust. But down low the jungle odor hung around the ground. Around me the circle stood naked an' silent. Not a man moved.

Who was the goldsmith?—I wondered. Who was the girl?

Then I heard steps behind me an' the jungle parted. I smelled somethin' burnin'. It wasn't tobacco, not the kind we have, but it was a sort of a tobacco flavor.

A man came out into the circle, smokin' a pipe.

"How are yuh?" he says, an' sticks forward a hand.

HE was a white man, part white anyway, an' he had on some funny clothes. They were made of skins, but they were cut like a tailor would cut 'em. He even had a skin hat with a stiff brim. He'd made the stiff brim out of green skin with the hair rubbed off.

He was smokin' a clay pipe, an' there was a vacant look in his eyes, a blank somethin' like a man who didn't have feelin's any more, but was just a man-machine.

I shook hands with him.

"Are they goin' to eat me?" I asks.

He smoked awhile before he spoke, an' then he takes the pipe out of his mouth an' nods his head.

"Sure," he says.

It wasn't encouragin'.

"Have hope," came the voice from the jungle, the voice of the girl. She seemed to be standin' close, close an' keepin' in one place, but I couldn't see her.

I talked to the man with the pipe. I made him a speech. He turned around and talked to the circle of men, an' they didn't say anything.

Finally an old man grunted, an' like the grunt was an order they all squatted down on their haunches, all of 'em facin' me.

Then the girl in the jungle made squeaky noises. The old man seemed to be listenin' to her. The others didn't listen to anything. They were just starin' at me, an' the expression on all of the faces was the same. It was sort of a curiosity, but it wasn't a curiosity to see what I looked like. I felt it was a curiosity to see what I'd taste like.

Then the goldsmith rubbed some more brown leaf into the pipe, right on top of the coals of the other pipeful.

"The girl is claimin' you as a slave," he says.

"Who is the girl?" I asked him.

"Kk-Kk," he says, an' I didn't know whether he was givin' me a name or warnin' me to keep quiet.

Well, I figured I'd rather be a slave than a meal, so I kept quiet.

Then the monkey man in the tree began to jabber.

They didn't look up at him, but I could see they were listenin'. When he got done the girl squeaked some more words.

Then the monkey-man made some more talk, and the girl talked. The fellow with the pipe smoked an' blew the smoke out of his nose. His eyes were weary an' puckered. He was an odd fellow.

Finally the old man that had grunted an' made 'em squat, gave another grunt. They all stood up.

"This is the show-down, I says to myself. It's either bein' a white slave or bein' a meat loaf.

The old man looked at me an' blinked. Then he sucked his lips into his mouth until his face was all puckered into wrinkles. He blinked his lidless eyes some more an' then grunted twice. Then all the men marched off. I could hear their feet boomin' along the hard ground in the jungle, on a path that had been beaten down hard by millions of bare feet. I found out afterward that same path had been used for over a hundred years, an' the king made a law it had to be traveled every day. That was the only way they could keep the ground hard.

I guess I'm a meal, I thought to myself. I figured the goldsmith would have told me if I had been goin' to be a slave. But he'd moved off with the rest, an' he hadn't said a word.

THE monkey-man kept talkin' to the bunch. He didn't walk along the path, but he moved through the trees, keepin' up in the branches, right over the heads of the others, an' talkin' all the time, an' his words didn't seem happy words. I sort of felt he

was scoldin' like a monkey that's watchin' yuh eat a coconut.

But the old man grunted at him, an' he shut up like a clam. He was mad, though. I could tell that because he set off through the trees, tearin' after a couple of monkeys. An' he pretty nearly caught 'em. They sounded like a whirlwind, tearin' through the branches. Then the sounds got fainter, an' finally everything was still.

I looked around. There was nobody in sight. I was there, on the fringe of beach, right near the edge of the jungle, and everything was still an' silent.

Then there came a rustlin' of the jungle stuff an' she came out.

She had on a skirt of grass stuff, an' her eyes were funny. You know how a monkey's eyes are? They're round. They don't squint up any at the corners. An' they're sort of moist an' glistening on the surface. It's a kind of a liquid expression.

Her eyes were like that.

For the rest she was like the others. Her skin was dusky, but not black, an' it was smooth. It was like a piece of chocolate silk.

"I'm Kk-Kk the daughter of Yik-Yik, and the keeper of the gold ledge," she said. "I have learned to speak the language of the goldsmith. You, too, speak the same language. You are my slave."

"Thank God I ain't a meal," I said. That was before the doctor guys discovered these here calories in food; but right then I didn't feel like a half a good-sized calory, much less a fit meal for a native warrior.

"You will be my slave," she said, "but if you pay skins to my father you can buy your freedom, and then you will be a warrior."

"I ain't never been a slave to a woman," I told her, me bein' one of the kind that had always kept from being led to the altar, "but I'd rather be a slave to you than to that old man on the boat out yonder."

There was something half shy about

her, and yet something proud and dignified.

"I have promised my father my share of the next hunt in order to purchase you from the tribe," she went on.

"Thanks," I told her, knowin' it was up to me to say somethin', but sort of wonderin' whether a free, white man should thank a woman who had made a slave outa him.

"Come," she said, an' turned away.

I had more of a chance to study her back. She was lithe, graceful, and she was a well-turned lass. There was a set to her head, a funny little twist of her shoulders when she walked that showed she was royalty and knowed it. Funny how people get that little touch of class no matter where they are or what stock. Just as soon as they get royal blood in 'em they get it. I've seen 'em everywhere.

I followed her into the jungle, down under the branches where there wasn't sunlight any more; but the day was just filled with green light.

Finally we came through the jungle an' into a big clearin'. There were huts around the clearin' an' a big fire. The people of the tribe were here, goin' about their business in knots of two an' three just like nothin' had happened. I was a member of the tribe now, the slave of Kk-Kk.

Most of the women stared, an' the kids scampered away when they seen me look toward 'em; but that was all. The men took me for granted.

CHAPTER III.

GUARDIANS OF GOLD.

THE girl took me to a hut. In one corner was a frame of wood with animal skins stretched over it. There were all kinds of skins. Some of 'em I knew, more of 'em I didn't.

She squeaked out some words, an' then there was some more jabberin' in a quaverin' voice, an' an old woman came an' brought me fruits.

I squatted down on my heels the way the natives did, an' tried to eat the fruit. My stomach was still pretty full of salt water an' sand, but the fruit tasted good. Then they gave me a half a coconut shell filled with some sort of creamy liquid that had bubbles comin' up in it. It tasted sort of sour, but it had a lot of authority. Ten minutes after I drank it I felt my neck snap back. It was the delayed kick, an' it was like the hind leg of a mule.

"Come," says the jane, an' led the way again out into the openin'.

I followed her, across the openin' into the jungle, along a path, past the shore of a lagoon, and up into a little cañon. Here the trees were thicker than ever except on the walls of the cañon itself. There'd been a few dirt slides in that cañon, an' in one or two places the rock had been stripped bare. After a ways it was all rock.

An' then we came to somethin' that made my eyes stick out. There was a ledge o' rock an' a vein o' quartz in it. The vein was just shot with gold, an' in the center it was almost pure gold. The quartz was crumbly, an' there were pieces of it scattered around on the ground. The foliage had been cleared away, an' the ground was hard. There was a fire goin' near the ledge an' some clay crucibles were there. Then there was a great bellows affair made out of thick, oiled leather. It was a big thing, but all the air came out of a little piece of hollow wood in the front.

I picked up one of the pieces of quartz. The rock could be crumbled between the fingers, an' it left the gold in my hand. The gold was just like it showed in the rock, spreadin' out to form sort of a tree. There must have been fifty dollars' worth in the piece o' rock that I crumbled up in my fingers.

I moved my hands around fast an' managed to slip the gold in my torn shirt. The girl was watchin' me with those funny, liquid eyes of hers, but she didn't say a word.

There was a great big pile of small

sticks between me an' the ledge of gold. I figured it was kindlin' wood that they kept for the fire. But finally my eyes got loose from the ledge of gold an' what should I see but the sticks movin'. I looked again, an' then I saw somethin' else.

It was a big ant heap made outa sticks an' sawdust. Some of those sticks were eight or ten inches long and half an inch around. And the whole place was swarming with ants. They had their heads stickin' out of the little holes between the sticks.

They must be big ants, I thought; but I was interested in that gold ledge. There must have been millions of dollars in it. I took a couple of steps toward it, an' then the ant heap just swarmed with life.

They were big ants covered with sort of a white wool and they came out of there like somebody had given 'em an order.

The girl shrieked somethin' in a high-pitched voice, but I didn't know whether it was at me or the ants.

The ants swarmed into two columns of maybe eight or ten abreast in each column, an' they started for me, swingin' out in a big circle as though one was goin' to come on one side, an' one on the other.

An' then they stopped. The girl ran forward an' put her arms on my shoulders an' started caressin' me, pattin' my hair, cooin' soft noises in my ears.

I thought maybe she'd gone cuckoo, an' I looked into her eyes, but they weren't lookin' at me, they were lookin' at the ants, an' they were wide with fear.

AN' the ants were lookin' at her. I could see their big eyes gazin' steadylike at her. Then somethin' else must have been said to 'em, although I didn't hear anything. But all at once, just like an army presentin' arms in response to an order, they threw up their long feelers an' waved 'em gently back an' forth. Then the

girl took me by the arm an' moved me away.

"I should have told you," she said, "never to go past the line of that path. The ants guard the yellow metal, and when one comes nearer than that they attack. There is no escape from those ants. I took you to them so you could help me with the feed. Now we will feed them."

That all sounded sorta cuckoo to me, but the whole business was cuckoo anyway.

"Look here," I tells this jane. "I'm willin' to be the slave of a chief's daughter—for awhile. But I ain't goin' to be slave to no ant hill."

"That is not expected," she said. "It is an honor to assist in feeding the ants, a sacred right. You only assist me. Never again must you come so near to the ants."

I did a lot of thinkin'. I wasn't hankerin' to come into an argument with those ants, but I was figurin' to take a closer slant at that gold ledge.

She took me away into the jungle where there was a pile of fruit dryin' in the sun. It was a funny sort of fruit, an' smelled sweet, like orange blossoms, only there was more of a honey smell to it.

"Take your arms full," she said.

Well, it was my first experience bein' a slave, but I couldn't see as it was much different from bein' a sailor, only the work was easier.

I scooped up both arms, full of the stuff. The smell made me a little dizzy at first, but I soon got used to it. The girl picked up some, too, an' she led the way back to the ant pile.

She had me put my load down an' showed me how to arrange it in a long semicircle. I could see the ants watchin' from out of the holes in the ant pile, but they didn't do anything except watch.

Finally the girl made a queer clickin' sound with her tongue an' teeth an' the ants commenced to boil out again.

This time they made for the fruit, an' they went in order, just like a bunch of swell passengers on one of the big ocean liners. Some of 'em seemed to hold first meal ticket while the others remained on guard. Then there must have been some signal from the ants, because the girl didn't say a word, but all of the first bunch of ants fell back an' stood guard, an' the second bunch of ants moved forward.

They repeated that a couple of times. I watched 'em, too fascinated to say a word.

After awhile I heard steps, an' the old goldsmith came along, puffin' his pipe regular, a puff for every two steps. He reminded me of a freight engine, boilin' along on a down grade, hittin' her up regular.

He didn't say a word to me, nor to the ants, but the ants heard him comin' an' they all formed into two lanes with their feelers wavin', an' the goldsmith walked down between those lanes an' up to the gold ledge. There he stuck some more wood on the fire, raked away some ashes an' pawed out a bed of coals.

THEN I saw he had a hammer an' a piece of metal that looked like a reddish iron. He pulled a skin away an' I saw lots of lumps an' stringers of pure gold. It was a yellow, frosty lookin' sort of gold, and it was so pure it glistened.

He picked up some of the pieces an' commenced to hammer 'em into ornaments.

"What do yuh do with that stuff?" I asked the girl, wavin' my hand careless like so she wouldn't think I was much interested.

"We trade it to the Fanti tribes," she said. "It is of no use, too soft to make weapons, too heavy for arrow points; but they use it to wear around their fingers and ankles. They give us many skins for it, and sometimes they try to capture our territory and take the entire ledge. If I had my way we

would stop making the ornaments. Our people do not like the metal, and never use it. Having it here just makes trouble for us, and the Fantis are fierce people. They are killing off our entire tribe."

I nodded as wise as a dozen owls on a limb.

"Yeah," I told her, "the stuff always makes trouble. Seems to me it'd be better to get rid of it."

The old goldsmith raised his head, twisted his pipe in his mouth and screwed his rheumy eyes at me. For a minute or two he acted like he was goin' to say somethin', an' then he went back to his work.

It was a close call. Right then I knew I'd been goin' too fast. But I had my eye on that ledge o' gold.

I guess it was a Fanti that saved my life; if it hadn't been for seein' him, the ants would have got me sure. Those ants looked pretty fierce when I saw 'em boilin' out in military formation, but by the time it came dark they didn't seem so much.

I got to thinkin' things over. Bein' a slave wasn't near so bad as it might be, an' one of these days I was goin' to get away in the jungle an' work down to a port. All I needed was to have about ninety pounds o' pure gold on my back when I went out an' I wouldn't be workin' as a sailor no more.

Sittin' there in the warm night, while the other folks had all rolled into their huts, I got to thinkin' things over. As a slave, I wasn't given a hut. I could sleep out. If the animals got bad I could either build up the fire or climb a tree. But there was fifty or sixty other slaves, mostly captured warriors of other tribes, an' it wasn't so bad.

There was a place in the jungle where the hills formed a bottle neck, an' there the tribe kept sentries so the Fantis couldn't get in, an' so the slaves couldn't get out. Gettin' through the jungle where there wasn't a trail was plain impossible.

I picked up a lot of this from the girl, an' a lot from usin' my eyes.

NIGHT time the ants didn't seem so much, an' the gold seemed a lot more. I wondered how I could work it, an' then a scheme hit me. I'd go out an' make a quick run for the ledge, chop off a few chunks o' quartz an' then beat it back quick. I'd be in an' out before the ants could come boilin' out of their thirty-foot ant hill. It seemed a cinch.

I sneaked away an' managed to find my way down the trail to the gold ledge. It was dark in the jungle. The stars were all misty, an' a squall was workin' somewheres out to sea. I could hear the thunder of the surf an' smell the smells of the jungle. There wasn't any noise outside of the poundin' surf.

I'd taken my shoes off when I dropped onto the raft, an' they'd got lost while I was rollin' around in the water, so I was barefoot. The ground had been beaten hard by millions of bare feet, an' so I made no noise. The hard part was tellin' just when I got to the gold ledge, because I didn't want to steer a wrong course an' fetch up against the ant heap.

I needn't have worried. I smelled the faint smell o' smoke, an' then a pile o' coals gleamed red against the black of the jungle night. It was the coals of the goldsmith's fire. I chuckled to myself. What a simple bunch o' people this tribe was!

An' then, all of a sudden, I knew some one else was there in the jungle. It was that funny feelin' that a man can't describe. It wasn't a sound, because there wasn't any sound. It wasn't anything I could see, because it was as dark as the inside of a pocket. But it was somethin' that just tingled on my skin an' made my hair bristle.

I slipped back from the path and into the dark of the jungle. Six feet from the trail an' I was hidden as well as though I'd been buried.

I got my eye up against a crack in

the leaves an' watched the coals of the camp fire, tryin' to see if anything moved.

All of a sudden those coals just blotted out. I thought maybe a leaf or a vine had got in front of my eyes, but there wasn't. It was just somethin' movin' between me an' the fire. An' then it stepped to one side, an' I saw it, a black man, naked, rushin' into the cliff of gold. He worked fast, that boy. The light from the coals showed me just a blur of black motion as he chipped rocks from the ledge.

Then he turned and sprinted out.

I chuckled to myself. The boy had got my system. It was a cinch, nothin' to it.

An' then there came a yell of pain. The black man began to do a devil's dance, wavin' his hands and legs. He'd got right in front of me, within ten feet he was, an' I could just make him out when he moved.

From the ground there came a faint whisperin' noise, an' then I could sense things crawlin'. I felt my blood turn to luke-warm water as I thought of the danger I was in. If those ants found me there—

I was afraid to move, an' I was afraid to stand still.

But the black boy solved the problem for me. He made for a tree, climb-in' up a creeper like a monkey. Up in the tree, I could hear his hands goin' as he tried to brush the ants off. And he kept up a low, moanin' noise, sort of a chatter of agony.

I couldn't tell whether the ants were leavin' him alone or whether they were watchin' the bottom of the tree, waitin' for him.

But the creeper that he'd climbed up stretched against the starlit sky almost in front of my nose. I could see it faintly outlined against the stars. And then I noticed that it was ripplin' an' swayin'. For a minute I couldn't make it out. Then I saw that those ants were swarmin' up the tree.

That was the end. The moanin'

became a yellin', an' then things began to thud to the ground. That must be the gold rock the fellow had packed away with him, probably in a skin bag slung over his shoulder.

Then the sounds quit. Everything was silent. But I sensed the jungle was full of activity, a horrid activity that made me want to vomit. I could smell somethin' that must have been blood, an' there was a drip-drip from the tree branches.

Then the coals flickered up an' I could see a little more. The ground was black, swarmin'. The ants were goin' back and forth, up an' down the creepers, up into the tree.

Finally somethin' fell to the ground. It couldn't have been a man, because it was too small, hardly bigger than a hunk o' deer meat; but the firelight flickered on it, an' I could see that the heap was all of a quiver. An' it kept gettin' smaller an' smaller. Then I knew. The ants were finishin' their work.

I held my hands to my eyes, but I couldn't shut out the sight. If I'd moved I was afraid the ants would turn to me. I hadn't been across the dead line, but would the ants know it? I shuddered and turned sick.

After awhile I looked out again. The ground was bare. All of the ants were back in their pile of sticks. The last of the firelight flickered on a bunch o' white bones. Near by was the gleam of yellow metal—gold from the rocks the Fanti had stolen.

Sick, I went back along the trail, back to the camp, not tellin' anybody where I'd been or what I'd seen. I still wanted that gold, but I didn't want it the way I'd figured I did.

I DIDN'T sleep much. They gave me a tanned skin for a bed and that was all. It was up to me to make myself comfortable on the ground. The ground was hard, but my bunk on the ship had been hard. It was the memory of that little black heap that

kept gettin' smaller an' smaller that tortured my mind.

I lived through the night, an' I lived through the days that followed; but I saw a lot that a white man shouldn't see. After all, I guess we think too much of life. Life didn't mean so much to those people, an' they didn't feel it was so blamed precious.

And I worked out a cinch scheme for the gold ledge. As the slave of Kk-Kk I had to assist her in feedin' the ants. Every night I had to bring up some of the fruit. Kk-Kk wouldn't let me feed it to 'em. It was the custom of the tribe that only the daughter of the chief could feed the ants. But I got close enough to find out a lot.

Those ants were trained. Kk-Kk could walk among 'em an' they took no notice of her. She was the one who fed 'em. The old goldsmith could walk through 'em whenever he wanted to, an' they didn't pay any attention to him. They'd been trained that way. But nobody else could cross the dead-line. Let any one else come closer than that an' they'd swarm out an' get started with their sickenin' business. Once they'd started there was no gettin' away.

I saw 'em at work a couple of times in the next week. They always managed to get behind the man at the gold ledge. Then they closed in on him. No matter how fast he ran they'd swarm up his legs as he went through 'em. Enough would get on him so he couldn't go far, an' there was always a solid formation of two-inch ants swarmin' behind, ready to finish the work.

But they fed 'em only one meal a day, in the afternoon. I got to figgerin' what would happen if there should be two feeders. They couldn't tell which was the official feeder, an' they'd been trained to let the official feeder to go to the gold ledge.

I knew where they kept the pile of dried fruits that the ants liked so well. An' I started goin' out to the ant pile

just before daybreak an' givin' 'em a breakfast. I'd take out a little of the fruit so there wouldn't be any crumbs left by the time the goldsmith came to work.

At first I could see the ants were suspicious, but they ate the fruit. There was one long, woolly fellow that seemed to be the big boss, an' he reported to a glossy-backed ant that was a king or queen or somethin'. I got to be good friends with the boss. He'd come an' eat outa my hand. Then he'd go back an' wave his feelers at the king or queen, whichever it was, an' finally, the old boy, or old girl, got so it was all right. There was nothin' to it. I was jake a million, one of the regular guys. I could tell by a hundred little things, the way they waved their feelers, the way they came for the food. Oh, I got to know 'em pretty well.

All of this time Kk-Kk was teachin' me things about the life an' customs of the tribe. I could see she was friendly. She'd had to learn the language of the goldsmith, so that if anything should happen to him she could educate another one as soon as the tribe captured him.

For the tribe I didn't have no particular love. You should have seen 'em in some of their devil-devil dances, or seen 'em in the full moon when they gave a banquet to their cousins, the monkeys. Nope, I figured that anything I could do to the tribe was somethin' well done. But for Kk-Kk I had different feelin's, an' I could see that she had different feelin's for me.

An' all this time the monkey-man was jealous. It was as plain as the nose on my face. Not the nose on his, 'cause his nose was flattened out like a monkey's nose, just two holes in his face with a black ring around it.

But he was in love with Kk-Kk, an' he wanted to buy her. In that country the woman didn't have anything to say about who she married, or whether she was wife No. 1 or No. 50. A man got his wives by buyin' 'em, and he could

have as many as he could buy an' keep.

After a coupla weeks I commenced taking the gold. At first I just got closer an' closer to the dead line. I can yet feel the cold sweat there was on me the first time I crossed it. But the ants figgered I was a regular guy, part of the gang. They never said a word. Finally, I walked right up to the ledge, watchin' the ground behind me like a hawk. Then I scooped out some o' the crumbly quartz and worked the gold out of it. After that it was easy.

I didn't take much at any one time, because I didn't want the goldsmith to miss anything. I wasn't any hog. Ninety pounds I wanted, an' ninety pounds was all I was goin' to take, but I wasn't a fool. I was goin' to take it a little at a time.

CHAPTER IV.

A FANTI RAID.

THEN came the night of the big fight.

I was asleep, wrapped up in my skin robes, not because of the cold, because the nights are warm an' steamy down there, but to keep out as much of the damp as I could, an' to shut out the night insects that liked my soft, white skin.

There came a yell from a sentry up the pass, an' then a lot o' whoopin' an' then all hell broke loose.

There was a little moon, an' by the light o' that moon I could see things happenin'.

Our warriors came boilin' outa their huts. One thing, they didn't have to dress. All a guy had to do was grab a spear an' shield, or climb up a tree with a bow an' arrow, an' that was all there was to it. He was dressed an' ready for business.

They evidently had the thing all rehearsed, 'cause some of 'em guarded the trail with spears, an' used thick

shields to ward off the poisoned arrows, an' others swarmed up in the trees an' shot little, poisoned arrows into the thick of the mass of men that were runnin' down the trail.

It was a funny fight. There wasn't any bangin' of firearms, but there was a lot o' yellin', an' in between yells could be heard the whispers of the arrows as they flitted through the night.

After awhile I could see that our men were gettin' the worst of it. I was just a slave, an' when a fight started the women watched the slaves to see they didn't make a break for liberty, or start attackin' our boys from the rear.

Maybe I'd like to escape plenty, but I wanted to do it my own way, an' stickin' a spear in the back o' one of our boys didn't seem the way to do it. Then again, I wouldn't be any better off after I had escaped. My white skin would make trouble for me with the others. I wasn't the same as the other slaves, most of whom were Fantis anyway. They could make a break an' be among friends. If I made a hop I'd just be outa the fryin' pan an' in the fire.

But I wasn't used to bein' a spectator on the side lines when there was fight goin' on. So I took a look at the situation.

When the alarm came in, the fire watchers had piled a lot of fagots on the big blaze, an' all the fight was goin' on by what light came from the fire. The fagots had burned off in the center an' there was a lot of flaming ends, fire on one side, stick on the other.

I whispers a few words to Kk-Kk, an' then we charged the fire, pickin' out the sticks, whirlin' 'em an' throwin' 'em into the mass o' savages that was borin' into our men.

She'd said somethin' to the slaves, an' they was all lined up, throwin' sticks too. They wasn't throwin' as wholeheartedly as Kk-Kk an' me was; but they was throwin' 'em, an' together we managed to keep the air full of brands.

It was a weird sight, those burnin'

embers whirlin' an' spiralin' through the air, over the heads of our boys, an' plumb into the middle o' the Fanti outfit.

I seen that I'd missed a bet at that, though, because we was really tearin' the fire to pieces, an' it was goin' to get dark in a few minutes with the blaze all bein' thrown into the air that way.

One of our warriors had collected himself a poisoned arrow, an' he was sprawled out, shield an' spear lyin' aside of him. The arrows were whisperin' around pretty lively, an' I seen a couple of our slave fellows crumple up in a heap. That shield looked good to me, an' while I was reachin' for it, I got to wonderin' why not take the spear too. There wasn't anybody to tell me not to, so I grabbed 'em both, an' then I charged into the mêlée.

Them savages fought more or less silent after the first rush. There was plenty of yells, but they were individual, isolated yells, not no steady war cries. I'd picked a good time to strut my stuff, because there was more or less of a lull when I started my charge.

MY clothes had been torn off my back. What few rags remained I'd thrown away, wantin' to get like the natives as fast as possible. My skin was still white, although it had tanned up a bit, but there wasn't any mistakin' me.

Our boys had got accustomed to the idea of a white man bein' a slave, an' they hadn't run into the white men like the Fanti outfit had. Those Fantis had probably had a little white meat on their bill o' fare for a change o' diet; an' some expedition or other had come along an' mopped up on 'em. Anyhow, the idea of a white man as a fightin' machine had registered good an' strong with 'em.

So when they heard one awful yell, an' seen a naked white man chargin' down on 'em with spear an' shield, yellin' like a maniac, an' with all the

whirlin' firebrands sailin' through the air, they thought it was time to quit.

There's somethin' funny about a nigger. They can say all they want to, but his fears are the big part of him, no matter how brave he gets. Those whirlin' brands o' fire wasn't makin' 'em feel any too good, an' then when I come chargin' down on 'em hell bent for election it was too much.

They wavered for a second, then gave a lot of yells on their own an' started pell-mell down the trail, each one tryin' to walk all over the heels of the boy in front.

Funny thing about a bunch of men once turnin' tail to a fight. When they do it they get into a panic. It ain't fear like one man or two men would feel fear. It's a panic, a blind somethin' that keeps 'em from thinkin' or feelin'. All they want to do is to run. There ain't any fight left in 'em.

It was awful what our crowd done to those boys. As soon as they started to run, the laddies with the spears started makin' corpses. An' I was right in the lead o' our bunch. Don't ask me how I got them. I don't know. I only know I was yellin' an' chargin', when the whole Fanti outfit turned tail, an' there I was, playin' pig-stickin' with the backs of a lot o' runnin' Fanti warriors for targets.

We gave up the chase after awhile. We'd done enough damage, an' there was a chance o' trouble runnin' too far into the jungle. The crowd ahead might organize an' turn on us, an' we'd got pretty well strung out along the jungle trail.

I herded the boys back, an' there was a regular road o' Fanti dead between us an' where the main part o' the battle had taken place.

Well, they called a big powwow around the camp fire after that. I seen Kk-Kk talkin' to her old man, Yik-Yik, an' I guess she was pretty proud of her slave. Anyhow, Yik-Yik sucked his lips into his mouth like he did when he was thinkin', an' then he called to me.

He got me in a ring o' warriors before the fire, an' he made a great speech. Then he handed me a bloody spear and shield, an' daubed my chest with some sort of paint, an' painted a coupla rings around my eyes, an' put three stripes o' paint on my cheeks.

Then all the warriors started jumpin' around the fire, stampin' their feet, wailin' some sort of a weird chant. Every few steps they'd all slam their feet down on the hard ground in unison, an' the leaves on the trees rattled with their stamping. It was a wild night.

Kk-Kk was interpreter. She told me they were givin' me my liberty an' adoptin' me into the tribe as a great warrior. It wasn't right that such a mighty fighter should be the slave of a woman, she told me.

Well, there's somethin' funny about women the world over. They all talk peace an' cooin' dove stuff, but they all like to see a son-of-a-gun of a good scrap. Kk-Kk's eyes were soft an' glowin' with pride, an' I could see she was as proud of me as though she'd been my mother or sweetheart or somethin'.

An' seein' that look in her eyes did somethin' to me. I'd been gettin' sorta sweet on Kk-Kk without knowin' it. She was a pretty enough lass for all her chocolate color. An' she was a square shooter. She'd stuck up for me from the first, an' if it hadn't been for her I'd have been a meal instead of a slave. It was only natural that I should get to like her more an' more. Then, when I'd got used to the native ideas an' all that, she got to lookin' pretty good to me.

ANYHOW, there I was in love with her—yes, an' I'm still in love with her. Maybe I did go native. What of it? There's worse things, an' Kk-Kk was a square shooter, I don't care what color her skin was. An' remember that she was the daughter of a king. There was royal

blood in her veins, an' that makes a difference, race or color or what not.

Anyhow, like it or not, I was in love with her, an' I still am.

Oh, I know I'm an old man now. Kk-Kk is awful old now if she's livin', because those natives get old quickly, an' I ain't no spring chicken myself. But I love her just the same.

Well, a white man is funny about his women. He ain't got no patience. When he falls in love he falls strong, an' he wants his girl. I didn't have patience like the monkey-man had. I couldn't wait around. I went to Kk-Kk the next day an' told her about it.

It was at the ant meal time when we was packin' fruit to 'em. I was still helpin' her even if I wasn't a slave any more. I did it because I wanted to.

Well, I told her; her eyes got all shiny, an' she dropped the dried fruit in a heap an' threw her arms around my neck, an' she cried a bit, an' made soft noises in the graduated monkey talk that is the real language of the tribe. Bein' all excited that way, she forgot the language of the goldsmith an' went back to the talk of her folks.

The ants came an' got the fruit, an' they crawled all over our feet eatin' it. If she hadn't been so happy, an' if I hadn't been so much in love we'd both have realized what it meant, the ants crawlin' over us that way an' not offerin' to bite me, or actin' hostile at all. It showed that I'd been makin' friends with 'em on the side.

Well, after awhile she broke away, an' then she did some more cryin' an' explained that she was the daughter of the chief. The man that married her would be the chief of the tribe some day. That is, he'd be the husband of the tribe's queen.

Now in that tribe the men bought their wives. The man who married Kk-Kk was the man who'd buy her hand from her old man. But, bein' as she was the daughter of the chief, an' the future queen of the tribe, it'd take more wealth to buy her hand than

any single man in the tribe could muster.

She told me how many skins an' how many hogs an' how much dried meat an' how many bows an' arrows an' spears, an' how many pounds of the native tobacco an' all that would be required.

I didn't pay much attention to the long list of stuff she rattled off. I had over sixty pounds of pure gold cached then, an' I felt like a millionaire.

After all, what was all this native stuff compared with what I had? I was a rich man for a common, ordinary sailor boy. I could take that gold right then an' walk into any of the world's market places an' buy what I wanted. Yes, an' there's even been cases of women of the higher muck-a-mucks sellin' themselves or their daughters in marriage for less than sixty pounds of pure gold.

Well, I laughed at Kk-Kk an' told her not to worry. I'd buy her hand from the old man. I didn't worry about the price. I was a sailor lad, an' I had the hot blood of youth in my veins, an' I was in love with Kk-Kk, an' she was standin' there with her eyes all limpid an' misty an' her arms around my neck, an' I had sixty pounds of pure gold. What more could a man want?

An' then I heard a noise an' looked up.

There was the monkey-man, squatting on the branch of a tree an' lookin' at us, and his lips were workin' back an' forth from his teeth. He wasn't sayin' a word, but his lips worked up an' down, an' every time they'd work, his teeth showed through.

I stiffened a bit, although it wasn't that I was afraid. Right then I felt that I could lick all the monkey-men in the world, either one at a time or all together.

Kk-Kk was frightened. I could feel the shivers runnin' up an' down her arms, an' she made little scared noises with her lips.

But the monkey-man didn't say anything. When he saw that we knew he was watchin', he reached up his great arms, caught the branch of a tree above him, swung off into space, caught another limb with his great feet, an' swirled off into the forest. All that was left was the twilight an' the chatterin' of a bunch of monkeys, an' the whimperin' noises Kk-Kk was makin'.

I PAT'TED the girl on the shoulder. Let the monkey-man storm around through the tree-tops. A lot of good that would do him. He wasn't in a position to buy the hand of Kk-Kk, an' he wasn't likely to be in the position. I had a big chunk of pure gold stored up. I didn't think it'd be any trick at all to complete the purchase.

By next day, though, I knew I was up against a funny problem. I had all the gold I could carry, but gold wasn't any good. I had enough of it to purchase a whole tannery full of choice skins, but I couldn't trade the gold for skins. The tribe I was with didn't care anything for the gold except as somethin' to trade to the Fanti boys. An' all the tradin' was done by the chief. The tribal custom prohibited the others from doin' any tradin', even from havin' any of the gold.

I commenced to see it wasn't as simple as I'd thought it was goin' to be.

An' all the while I got more an' more in love with Kk-Kk. She was just the sort of a woman a real adventurin' man wants. She'd keep her head in any emergency. She was strong an' tender. There wasn't an ache nor a pain in her system. When she moved she walked like it wasn't any effort at all. If the trees looked easier than the trail she'd swing up in them an' go from branch to branch, light as a feather driftin' down wind.

I'm tellin' you she was strong as an ox an' as graceful as a panther. A woman like that 'd go with a man anywhere. An' she was sweet an' tender.

When she thought I was blue for the white race an' home an' all that, she'd draw my head down against her breast an' croon to me as soft an' low as the wind sighin' through the tops of the jungle trees.

I wanted to take her away with me. Any one could see the tribe was doomed. The very gold that gave them their tradin' power was their curse. The Fantis desired that gold. They might get beat in one battle, might get beat in a thousand, but as long as the ledge was there, there'd be invaders fightin' to get possession of it.

It'd be only a question of time until the tribe was wiped out, defeated, captured, an' the women turned into slaves. They couldn't stand the climate in the interior. Four or five miles back from the ocean was their limit. The Fantis wanted that gold ledge. Every so often there'd be a battle, an' when it was over there'd be dead an' wounded. There was always plenty more of the enemy, but there was a few less of our boys after every fight.

If I could get away an' take Kk-Kk with me, an' a pack load of gold, what I could carry an' what Kk-Kk could carry, we'd be fixed for life. We could go out into the cities an' hold up our heads with any of 'em.

But I knew I was goin' to have trouble gettin' Kk-Kk to see things that way. I might get her to leave with me, but she'd been brought up with the idea that her obligation to the tribe was sacred. She wouldn't take any of the gold. You see she hadn't ever had to deal with money, an' she did what she thought was right, not what she thought would make the most money for her.

While I was thinkin' things over, the monkey-man comes swingin' into the council an' tells 'em he's goin' to buy the hand of Kk-Kk at the next full moon. That was all he said. He wouldn't tell 'em where he was goin' to get the stuff or anything.

But it was enough to get me worried. An' I could see it bothered Kk-Kk.

THERE was lots o' wild rumors goin' along in those days. There was a report that the Ashantis an' the Fantis were gettin' together for a joint attack. They was determined to get that gold ledge.

I tried to get Kk-Kk to advise the tribe to leave the thing. Without that gold they'd be safe from attack, an' the gold didn't mean so much to 'em anyhow.

But they were just like the rest of the nations, if a man could compare a savage tribe with a nation. They wanted their gold, even when it wasn't doin' the rank an' file of 'em any good. They were goin' to fight for it, lay down their lives for it if they had to, an' all the time only the ruler had any right to use the gold to trade with.

They knew they could have peace by goin' away. They must have seen they couldn't last long stayin' there. Every battle left 'em a little weaker. But no, they must stay an' die for their ledge of gold, an' they didn't even know the value of it. It's funny about gold that way.

There was another rumor goin' around that made me do a lot of thinkin', an' that was of a white man that was camped a couple of days march away. He had a big outfit with him, an' he was shootin' big game an' prospectin' around in general.

A wild idea got into my head that if I could sneak away an' get to him with fifty or sixty pounds of gold I could trade it for mirrors, guns, blankets an' what not that would look like a million dollars to the old chief. Then I could buy Kk-Kk an' maybe I could talk her into goin' away with me.

I really had enough gold, but I was gettin' a little hoggish. I wanted more. The love of a woman like Kk-Kk had ought to make a man richer than the richest king in the world, but I was a

white man, an' I'd been taught to worship gold along with God.

In fact, I'd only had that God worship idea taught me on Sundays when I was a kid. On week days the god was gold. My folks had been rated as bein' pretty religious as common folks go. But even they hadn't tried to carry religion past Sunday. Gold was the god six days of the week, an' I'd been brought up with the white man's idea.

So I had to get me a little more gold. I wanted it so I could go to the white man's camp with all the gold I could carry an' still have as much left behind, hidden in the ground, waitin' for me to come back.

The next mornin' I decided to take a chance an' scoop out a big lot o' quartz. I got out with the food for the ants all right; I hadn't even thought about trouble with them for a long while. They'd quit bein' one of my worries. I walked over to the ledge and dug into the quartz.

An' then somethin' funny struck me. It was a feelin' like somethin' was borin' into my back. I whirled around an' there was the monkey-man sittin' on a limb, watchin' me.

He was up in a tree, squatted on the limb, his hands holdin' a bow with one of them poison arrows on the string an' it was then I noticed the way his toes came around the under side of the limb an' held him firm. Funny how a fellow 'll notice things like that when he's figurin' he has an appointment in eternity right away.

CHAPTER V.

THE MONKEY-MAN.

I STARED into the monkey-man's eyes, an' he stared back. I'd read somewhere that a white man always has the advantage over the other races because there's some kind of a racial inferiority that the other fellows develop in a pinch.

Maybe it's true, an' maybe it ain't. I only know I stared at the monkey-man, an' he fidgeted his fingers around on the bow string.

I was caught red-handed. One of those poison arrows would almost drop me in my tracks. I wouldn't have a chance to get outside of the dead line.

It looked like curtains for me. Then a funny thing happened. I thought at the time it was because of my starin' eyes an' the racial inferiority an' what not. Now I know the real reason. But the monkey-man lowered the bow, blinked his eyes a couple of times, just like a monkey puzzlin' over a new idea, an' then he reached up one of those long paws, grabbed a branch overhead, swung up into the higher trees an' was off.

It looked like he'd gone to get some witnesses, an' it was up to me to bury my gold an' be snappy about it. I could see the ants were finishin' up the last of the feed I'd given 'em, an' I wouldn't have to be afraid of some of that bein' left.

I took the gold an' sprinted for the place where I kept it hid. I buried the new batch with the other, an' then strolled back to the clearin', tryin' to look innocent.

I felt a big weight on my chest. Somehow I felt the monkey-man was goin' to get me. If he could make his charges stick I was sure due to be a meal before night.

But the funny part of it was he didn't make any charges. He even wasn't there at all. Funny. I walked around an' passed the few words of the language I'd picked up with some of the warriors, an' then I saw Kk-Kk.

It was sort of a lazy life, livin' there that way. The tradin' power of the gold ornaments gave the tribe the bulge on things. They didn't have to work so awful hard. Funny, too, they didn't savvy rightly about the gold. They thought it wasn't the metal, but the way the goldsmith worked it up into rings an' bracelets an' such like that

made it valuable. Gold as such they couldn't understand.

Anyhow, the warriors didn't have anything to do except a little huntin' once in awhile. The women did all of the real work, an' there wasn't much of that.

Kk-Kk an' me walked down to the beach an' I watched the green surf thunderin' in. Her arm was nestled around me an' her head was up against my shoulder. I felt a possessory sort of feelin' like I owned the whole world. I patted her head an' told her there wasn't anything to be afraid of, that I was goin' to make good on buyin' her an' that I'd boost any price the monkey-man was able to raise.

She felt curious, but when she seen I didn't want to answer questions she let things go without talkin'. She was a wonderful girl, the kind that any man could be proud of, particularly a rough, seafarin' man that had sailed all the seas of the world an' knocked about in all sorts of weather.

I broke away from her when the sun was well up. I knew she'd go down to the ocean with the tribe for her bath.

That was my chance. I raced into the jungle to the place where I'd left my gold.

ALL that a man could pack away was gone. There wasn't over twenty pounds left. The ground had been dug up an' the gold rooted up. It was there in the sun, glistenin' soft an' yellow against the green of the jungle an' the rich brown of the earth.

For a minute my heart made a flip-flop, an' then I knew. The monkey-man hadn't given the alarm at all. He'd come to know somethin' of the power of the gold, an' when he saw me feedin' the ants an' helpin' myself at the gold ledge he realized I must have a bunch of it cached away. That had been why he hadn't shot me with a poisoned arrow. He'd swung up out of sight in the high trees an' waited for me to lead him to the place where I'd

buried the gold. With his trainin' in slippin' through the branches of the trees there hadn't been anything to it. He followed me as easy as a bird could flit through the branches.

Now he'd taken all the gold he could carry. He'd been in a hurry. He hadn't stopped to bury the rest some place else, even, or to cover it over with earth. Why? There was only one answer. He'd made a bluff about buyin' Kk-Kk from her old man, an' he wanted to make good. He'd heard about the white man an' his camp, an' he'd got the same idea I'd had, an' he'd got a head start on me.

I had a skin pouch with a couple of straps goin' over the shoulders. I loaded the gold that was left in it an' made my start. I knew there'd be trouble gettin' past the sentries at the bottleneck, but I couldn't wait for night. The monkey-man could slip through in the trees. I'd have to rely on bluff and nerve.

It wasn't gettin' past 'em that was the hard part. It was carryin' the gold out. As a warrior, I was entitled to go out in the jungle to hunt, to come an' go as I pleased. It was what was in that skin pouch that would make the trouble.

Then I got another idea. There'd been a kill the day before of some little sort of an antelope that ran around the jungle. I knew where some of the meat was. The gold didn't amount to much in size, an' I raced over an' stuffed some animal meat on the top of it. It was sink or swim, an' I couldn't wait to fix up any fancy plan.

I grabbed a spear an' a shield an' started down the path. The sentries flashed their white teeth at me an' blinked their round eyes. Then one of 'em noticed the pack on my back an' he flopped his spear down while he came over to investigate.

I didn't act like I was the least bit frightened. I even opened the sack myself, an' I made a lot of motions. I pointed to the sun, an' I swung my

hand up an' down four times tellin' 'em that I'd be away four days. Then I pointed to the meat an' to my mouth, explainin' that it was for food.

I threw in a little comic stuff an' had 'em laughin'. They laughed easy, those jungle men who were so blamed ignorant they didn't know the power of gold.

It was a cinch. I was on my way, headin' into hostile territory, knowin' that the Fantis were in the country an' that I'd be a fine meal for 'em. It's a funny sensation, figgerin' that you're only valuable for the meat you can be made into, estimatin' your calory value on the hoof.

Anyhow, the thing had been started, an' I had to see it through. After I got into the country where the white men went, the color of my skin should protect me from the tribes. The white man gets respect from the blacks. He kills a lot of blacks to do it, but he gets results.

It was the first few miles that had me worried. I had to go through the Eso country an' into the Nitchwa country, an' I was in a hurry. I couldn't go slow an' cautious like, an' I couldn't take to the trees like the monkey-man could.

THE first day I almost got caught. A bunch of Fanti warriors came down the trail. I swung off to one side, workin' my way into the thickest of the jungle, an' hidin' in the shadows. I thought sure I was caught, because those boys have eyes that can see in the dark. But I got by.

The second day I didn't see a soul. I was gettin' in a more open, rollin' country, an' I only had a general idea where I was goin'. There was a hill that stood up pretty well over the rest of the country, an' I got up on that an' climbed a tree.

Just at dusk I see 'em, hundreds of fires twinklin' through the dusk like little stars. I figgered that 'd be the camp of the white man.

It ain't healthy to go through the jungle at night. There are too many animals who have picked up the habits of man an' figger that turn-about is fair play. They relish the flesh of a man, more particularly a white man, as a rare delicacy.

We don't think nothin' o' stalkin' a nice buck an' havin' our mouth water an' think how tasty he's goin' to be broiled over a bed o' coals. But if the buck turns around an' starts stalkin' us an' lickin' his chops over how nice we're goin' to taste it's a different affair altogether.

I know, because for two hours I worked through the country with eyes glarin' out of the jungle all around, an' soft steps fallin' into the trail behind me. They were animals, stalkin' along behind, a little afraid of the white man smell, hesitatin' a bit about closin' the gap an' makin' a supper outa me, but feelin' their mouths water at the thought.

Yes, sir, I know how it feels to be hunted by somethin' that's just figgerin' how nice you're goin' to taste after he's got his paws on you.

Well, finally I came to the camp of the white man. I could see him sittin' there, all bearded an' tanned. He was wearin' white clothes an' sittin' before a fire with a lot o' native servants waitin' around with food an' drink an' what not.

I walked up to him, pretty well all in, an' motioned to my mouth. I'd been so used to talkin' to the natives that way that for a moment I forgot that this man talked my language.

Then I told him. "I come to trade," I says, an' dumped out the gold on the ground.

He went up outa the canvas chair like he'd been shot.

"Another one!" he yelled. "An' this one's white!"

Then he clapped his hands, an' black men came runnin' up an' grabbed me.

"Where did yuh get it? Where is it? Is there any more? How long will

it take to get there?" he yells at me, his face all purple, with the veins standin' out an' the eyes bulgin'.

I'd forgotten how excited white men got at the sight of gold.

"Gold! Gold!" he goes on. "The country must be lousy with gold! There was a big ape hanging around camp this morning. He seemed a higher species of ape, almost human. I stalked him and shot him for a specimen. Can you imagine my surprise when I found that he was carrying a skin filled with gold?"

"And this is the same gold. I'd recognize it anywhere. Come, my good man, come and tell me if you have ever seen a similar creature to this great ape. I have preserved him in alcohol and intend to carry him intact to the British Museum."

I COULD feel myself turnin' sorta sick at the idea, but there was nothin' for it. He was draggin' me along to a big vat. There was the monkey-man, a bullet hole in his back—in his back, mind you. He hadn't even shot him from the front, but had sneaked around to the rear. The "specimen" was floatin' around in the alcohol.

I turned away.

"Tell me, tell me," pleads the guy, "do you know him? Your gold comes from the same source. Perhaps you have seen others of the same species."

"After I shot him I was overcome with remorse because he might have showed me the way to the gold deposit if I had merely captured him. But I shot before I knew of the gold."

I did some rapid thinkin'. If this bird thought I knew where the gold came from he'd force me to show him, or perhaps he'd kill me an' stick me in alcohol. So I looked sad.

"No, I don't know," I tells him. "I saw this man-monkey carryin' a skin full of somethin' heavy. I followed along until he sat down the sack an'

went to sleep. Then I sneaked up, seen it was gold, an' figgered a monkey-man didn't have no use for gold."

He nods his head. "Quite right, my friend. Quite right. A monkey can have no use for gold. And how about yourself? You possibly have no use for it. At any rate you admit it was part of the gold that belonged to the monkey, so you should restore it to the original pile, and I will take charge of it."

I seen this bird was one of the kind that want everything for nothin' an' insist that a guy mustn't hold out on 'em.

I told him that I'm only too glad to oblige, but I want some calicos an' some mirrors an' blankets an' a gun an' some ammunition, an' some huntin' knives an' beads. After that he can have the gold.

We dickered for awhile, an' finally I dusted out, takin' two porters with me, frightened to death but loaded down with junk. I was carryin' the rifle, an' I was watchin' my back trail. The old boy might figure I was a specimen.

I got back all right. We had one brush with the Fanti outfit, but the roar of the gun made 'em take to the tall timber. I had the porters lay the junk down about two miles from the place where our tribe was camped, an' I sneaked it up to the bottle-neck myself, carryin' three loads of it. Then I came on up to the sentries, shook hands, walked past an' got a couple of warriors to help me with the plunder.

Kk-Kk was there, all dolled up in all her finery, paradin' around the village. That's a custom they got from the Fantis. When a girl's offered for sale in marriage she decks herself out with everything the family's got an' parades around the village. That's a notice to bidders.

I knew Kk-Kk was doin' it for me. She had to comply with the customs of the tribe, but she figgered I was the

only bird that could make the grade an' she trusted to my resourcefulness to bring home the bacon.

CHAPTER VI.

AFRICAN JUSTICE.

MY stuff was a riot. When I had the fellows spread it out on the ground the boys' eyes stuck out until their foreheads bulged. Most of 'em had never seen the trade goods of the white man. They'd been kept pretty well isolated with the hostile Fanti outfit hemmin' 'em in by land an' the open ocean thunderin' on the beach.

The knives made the hit. The warriors were hunters enough to appreciate a keen-edged bit of shiny steel. The blankets didn't take very well, neither did the calico, but the knives, the mirrors an' the beads were drawin' cards that couldn't be beat.

Old Yik-Yik screwed up his eyes an' sucked in his mouth, the way he had when he was thinkin', an' then he jabbers out a bunch of graduated monkey talk. The goldsmith was there an' he blinks his rheumy eyes an' sticks out his hand.

"The old bird says you've bought the girl," he tells me.

I could feel my heart do a flip-flop. It was all matter-of-fact to them, the buyin' of a wife, even if she did happen to be the future queen of the tribe. But to me there was only one Kk-Kk in the world, an' now she was to be mine. The only man that knew my secret was the monkey-man, an' he was floatin' around in a vat of alcohol. I could settle down in the tribe an' be happy the rest of my life.

But, in spite of it all, I was feelin' off color. My head felt light. When I'd turn it quick it seemed to keep right on goin' for a couple of revolutions. An' my feet felt funny, as though they wasn't settin' firm on the ground.

But what of it? Wasn't I goin' to

marry Kk-Kk? What was a little biliousness more or less?

An' then there was a bunch o' yellin'. I looked up an' seen a couple of the sentries bringin' in a captive. Another meal, I thought to myself, wonderin' if maybe he'd be in time to furnish the spread at the weddin' feast.

I looked again, an' then my mouth got all dry an' fuzzy.

It was one of the porters that had carried out my stuff. Probably he had sneaked back to try an' find the gold, or else some of the hunters had caught him. In either event my hash was cooked. When he told 'em what I'd traded to the white man—

I strained my ears. Some of our crowd talked Fanti, an' maybe the porter talked it. He did. I heard 'em jabberin' away, an' the porter pointed at me an' at the stuff on the ground.

I stole a look at Yik-Yik. His eyes was as hard as a couple of glass beads, an' his lips was all sucked in until his mouth was just a network of puckered wrinkles.

He spits out some words an' a circle forms around me. The goldsmith was still there an' he kept right on actin' as interpreter, but I didn't need to follow half what he said.

An' then, all of a sudden, I stiffened up to real attention. It seemed the old man was accusin' Kk-Kk o' betrayin' the tribe.

For a minute or two I thought he'd gone clean cuckoo, an' then I seen just how it looked to him. Kk-Kk was in love with me. The monkey-man, who she didn't like, had threatened to buy her. There was a white man in the country. What was more likely than that she'd slipped me out a bunch of gold?

I TRIED to tell 'em, but they would not listen. Kk-Kk looked all white around the gills for a minute, an' then she walked over to my side.

"We shall meet death together," she said, dignified as a queen had ought

to be. But I wasn't goin' to stand for it.

I tried to tell 'em about how I had the ants trained. I volunteered to show 'em. I tried to get 'em to feed me to the ants. But they wouldn't listen to me. Kk-Kk was the only one they'd listen to, an' she wouldn't say a word. She wanted to die with me.

Then was when I knew I was sick. The whole ground started reelin' around, an' I felt so drowsy I could hardly hold my eyes open. My head was burnin' an' throbbin' an' it seemed as though the damp odors of the jungle was soaked all through my blood an' was smotherin' me under a blanket of jungle mist.

Their voices sounded farther an' farther away.

I heard the goldsmith tellin' me the sentence the chief was pronouncin'. He had to lean up against my ear an' shout to make me understand.

It seemed they had a funny bread made out of some berries an' roots. When a fellow ate it he lost his memory.

The old king had decided not to kill us, but to feed us this bread an' banish us from the tribe.

Since we'd committed the crime against the tribe because we wanted to marry, it seemed like proper justice for the old boy to feed us *king-kee*, the bread of forgetfulness, so we wouldn't ever remember about the other.

It was a horrible punishment. If I hadn't been comin' down sick I'd have made a break an' forced 'em to kill me, or turned loose with the rifle an' seen if I couldn't have escaped with Kk-Kk.

But I was a sick man. I felt 'em stuffin' somethin' in my mouth, an' I swallowed mechanically an' cried for water.

Then I remember seein' Kk-Kk's eyes, all misty an' floatin' with tears, bendin' over me. Then I sank into a sleep or stupor. Everything snuffed out like a candle goin' out.

Lord knows how much later I began to come to. I was in Cape Coast Castle. They told me some natives had brought me on a stretcher, sat me down before the door of the buildin' where they kept the medicines, an' gone away. It had been done at night. They found me there the next mornin' sick with the sleepin' sickness.

When I woke up I couldn't tell 'em who I was, where I'd been, or how I got there. I only knew I wanted somethin' an' couldn't tell what it was.

A BOAT came in, an' they shipped me on her. The surgeon aboard got interested in my case. Every time it rained I'd sleep. There was somethin' in the smell of dampness in the air.

He treated me like I'd been a king, an' took me to Boston. There was some German doctor there that had specialized on tropical fevers. They had me there for six months studyin' my case.

The doctor told me I was victim of what he called auto-hypnosis. He said the only reason I went to sleep when it rained was because I thought of sleep when it rained.

I told him it was the fever in my blood comin' out when it got damp, but he just shook his head an' said auto-hypnosis, whatever that might mean.

He tried for six months to get me over it, an' then he gave it up as a bad job.

He said for me to come to California or Arizona an' get out in the desert, where it only rained once or twice a year, an' to always be in my tent when it rained.

I followed his advice. For fifty years now I've been livin' out here in the desert.

Every time it rains an' I smell the damp air, it acts on me like the jungle smells when I had the sleepin' sickness, an' I go to sleep. Sometimes I fall

asleep and don't waken for two weeks at a stretch.

But it's funny about me. Now that I'm gettin' old, my memory's comin' back to me. Particularly after I wake up, I can recall everything like I've just told it to you.

Of course I'm an old man now, nothin' but a bum of a desert rat, out here scratchin' around in the sand an' sagebrush for a few colors of gold. I got me a placer staked out over there at the base of that hill.

Ain't it funny that I have to spend my life lookin' for gold, when it was grabbin' the gold in big chunks that made all my troubles? Oh, well, it's all in a lifetime.

Of course I'm too old to be thinkin' of such things now. But I get awful lonesome for Kk-Kk. I can see her round, liquid eyes shinin' at me whenever I wake up from one of these long sleeps. I wonder if she's got her memory comin' back, now that she's gettin' old—an' I wonder if she ever thinks of me—

Yes, sir. Thankee, sir. Another cup of that coffee will go kinda good. When a man's been asleep for eight or nine days he wakes up sorta slow. I'll drink this coffee an' then I'll be headin' over toward my placer claim.

I'm sorry I bothered you folks, but that rain came up mighty sudden, an' the first thing I knew I was soakin' wet an' sleepy, smellin' the damp smell of the earth an' the desert stuff. I crawled in this bunch of Joshuay palms, an' that's the last I remember until you came along an' poured the hot coffee down me.

No, thanks, I don't believe I'll stay any longer.

My tent's fixed up mighty comfortable over there, an' when I wake up this way it seems like I've been with Kk-Kk in a dream world. I like to think about my lost sweetheart.

So long, boys. Thanks for the coffee.

THE END

The Golden Burden

*Ninety million dollars! What would they mean to you?
The end of all worries? Young Glenn Brooks
thought so, too—and found, to his
amazement, that his troubles
had only started*



By FRED MacISAAC

CHAPTER I.

STARTLING NEWS.

GLENN BROOKS had always known that his uncle, Peter Brooks was fabulously rich, but he had never been interested in that fact because he was well aware that there had been a feud between the two brothers from boyhood. Their already strained relations had been further embittered by the marriage of Glenn's father Elbert to the girl whom Peter loved.

Peter Brooks had loved Ellen Cody as passionately as a mean, crafty, and completely self-centered young man could love a pretty young woman; and his fury at her refusal of himself was augmented by her selection of the brother whom he hated as her husband.

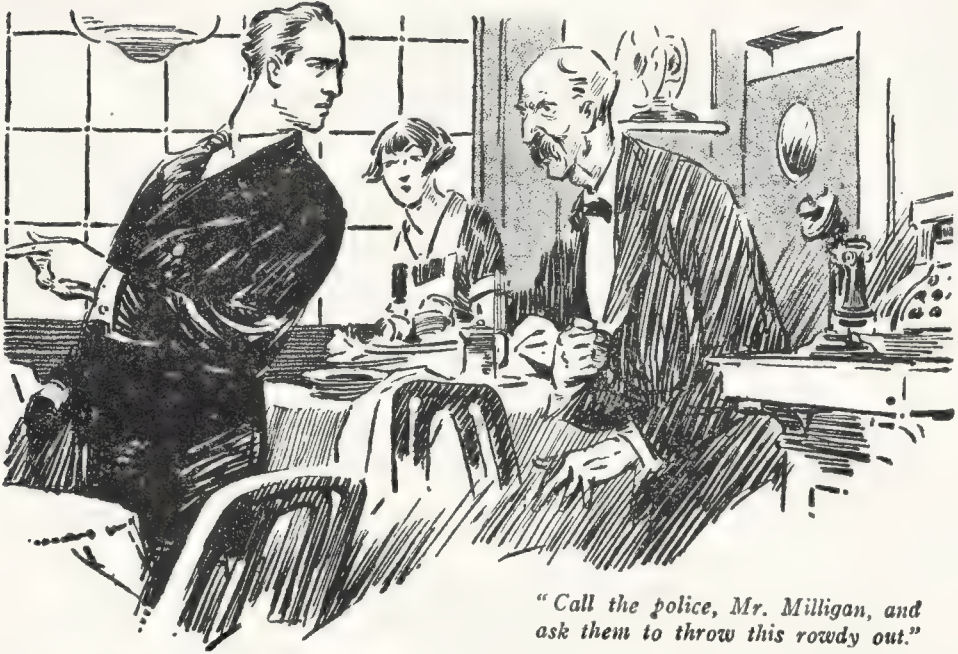
At the time that Elbert Brooks married Glenn's mother, he was twenty-five years old and Peter was twenty-three. Peter had packed his grips and departed from Elmhurst a week before the wedding, leaving no farewell message to his parents, but writing a bitter note to his brother's bride-to-be in which he sneered at her judgment, assured her

that she had chosen a weak-willed, thick-witted husband who would never be able to get on in the world, and declaring that he would hate them both until the day he died.

Elbert Brooks never saw that letter, for Ellen knew how it would grieve him. Peter's hatred had never been reciprocated by him; he was kindly, generous, forbearing, and rather futile. Ellen suspected that he would not make his way in the world very well, but she didn't care because she loved him.

They had only one child whom, by the sort of sacrifices that parents love to make, they managed to send through college. They lived in a small house in a small town where Elbert operated a hardware store from which he scratched a bare livelihood, but they were happy. They died within six months of each other when Glenn Brooks was twenty-four years old.

Peter Brooks had gone west to Chicago. For years no word of him had trickled back to Elmhurst, Connecticut, then a traveler told Elbert that his brother had the agency of an automobile company in the city by Lake Michigan.



"Call the police, Mr. Milligan, and ask them to throw this rowdy out."

Automobiles were in their infancy, and Peter Brooks prospered with the industry. If he had been mean and spiteful, selfish and unpleasant, he was also keen and capable. He went into the manufacturing end of the automobile business, produced a medium-priced car which caught the popular fancy and in 1927 was assumed to be enormously rich.

Of course, the Elbert Brookses had never communicated with him; Peter had not written them a line in the twenty-six years of their married life; but Ellen had felt it her duty to wire him of the death of his brother. No notice was taken of the wire, to the wrath of the widow; and when she passed away, Glenn saw no reason why he should notify his vindictive uncle.

After the death of his parents, Glenn entered a law office in Elmhurst. He had hoped to go through law school, but conditions at home had made it impossible. About two thousand dollars was all that the Elbert Brooks had accumulated during their term of existence, but they had given their son a good home and a good education before

they went to the next world where there must be rewards for decent, honest, God-fearing people.

Glenn was a fine physical specimen, tall and straight and broad of shoulders, with eyes that were dark blue and usually twinkled with laughter, a happy contagious laugh, a round pleasant face, and a set of nice white teeth.

He grieved for his parents, but at once buckled down to hard work. With six years of study in a law office he might pass the bar examinations and set up for himself. In the meantime, he was poor, had no time to waste in folly. He was not in love and kept away from girls because he could not afford to entertain them. His outlook on life was cheerful.

ABOUT one year after the loss of his mother Glenn Brooks read in the evening paper of the death of his Uncle Peter. It did not affect him in the slightest. Although his father had never spoken invidiously of the man, Mrs. Brooks had not hesitated to reveal to her son the despicable character of his uncle.

Glenn still resented Uncle Peter's failure to exhibit human feelings when notified of the demise of his only brother, and the news that the multimillionaire had not long survived the man he hated seemed to be a direct punishment by Providence.

However Elmhurst editors considered the passing on of a local boy who had gone west and made a tremendous success as very big news and they played it up for a column on the front page. Glenn read that his uncle had never married, news to him, and that his fortune was estimated at a hundred millions of dollars, a figure beyond his comprehension.

He was human enough to speculate as to the disposition of this fortune. If Peter had not left a will the law would give at least a portion of his money to his nephew; however, Uncle Peter was too prominent and important an individual not to have made a will, and he would certainly not allow such good fortune to befall his hated Elmhurst relative. Nevertheless Glenn was forced to shake hands with a dozen persons on the street as he walked to his boarding place, men and women who supposed he might benefit by the death of his uncle.

About midnight, Glenn, who had gone to bed at his usual hour of ten, was awakened by a knock on his door and the landlady's acid voice. She had been roused by the ringing of the front doorbell by a district messenger boy with a telegram for him. She thrust it under the door and departed while Glenn rose, turned on the light, opened the telegram, and read:

By the will of your late uncle, Peter Brooks, you are his only heir. If possible come at once to Chicago to be present at funeral and attend to necessary formalities.

(Signed)

WALKER AND GROVES, Attorneys,
Kimball Building, Chicago.

Imagine how you would feel if you suddenly were informed that somebody

had left you ten thousand dollars; then multiply your emotions a hundred fold, then you will have some idea of the shock of this bolt from the blue.

Glenn Brooks had no notion in the world that he would benefit by one red cent from his uncle's demise. He was certain indeed that he would be expressly barred out by Peter Brooks's will—yet the old man had written a testament which deliberately selected him as his heir. It did not seem possible, he was hardly able to credit it, yet his heart beat rapidly, his head ached, he could not lie down or sit down but walked back and forth, his fingers twitching.

A hundred million dollars, one of the world's great fortunes, and it was his! What on earth would he do with it? His life would be revolutionized. Rich!

A dreadful thought. Suppose this telegram was a joke. Some local humorists might have concocted it with a stolen telegram blank. He inspected it intently, but it seemed regular enough. With trembling hands he began to dress, for there was no telephone in his room, and he wished to call the telegraph office for confirmation.

Breathlessly he waited for the connection. "Please repeat a telegram just delivered to Glenn Brooks," he requested of the male voice which answered. There was a chuckle.

"Don't believe it, Glenn?" said the man. "This is Joe Mullen talking. It's O K on this end."

"Good God," he breathed.

"Congratulations, Glenn. Remember you used to know me when you were poor!"

CHAPTER II.

THE CURSE OF MIDAS.

IN Chicago, Uncle Peter Brooks had been a bachelor and had lived at a fashionable club. The funeral was from an Episcopal church of which he had been a member. The church was

filled with business acquaintances, delegations of societies to which he belonged, representatives of all the great automobile companies, members of the stock exchange, his business staff, and agents of his car from hundreds of miles around.

Glenn Brooks, as chief mourner, was an object of terrific interest. Despite his protests, he had been photographed by newspaper photographers from the moment he stepped from the train until he entered the church.

To the Chicago newspapers the personality of a small town youth, a student in a law office, who had stepped into the control of one of the mightiest estates in America, was of absorbing concern. Both male and female reporters besieged him. Invitations from persons of presumptive importance, but of whom he had never heard were piled upon the table in his hotel suite. For the first time in his life Glenn Brooks was a personage and he didn't like it.

The lawyers had confirmed his good fortune, for Mr. Brooks had made his will only a few weeks before and a copy rested in their safe. Of the details they gave him no information; these must wait until after the funeral, but he was no longer doubtful.

In a dazed condition he sat in the front pew and heard a distinguished clergyman eulogize the deceased whose mortal remains lay in a black box before the altar. It was a "high" church and the ritual was elaborate. It appeared from what the minister said that Peter Brooks was a wonderful person, a man of astounding liberality, great nobility of character, high-minded, a sterling citizen.

Glenn did not recognize the description. Could this be the uncle who had treated Glenn's own parents so contemptuously? Yet he must have felt remorse, else why should he leave this overwhelming fortune to his nephew, the son of the brother he hated? Glenn tried to grieve for his uncle, but after all he had never seen the man in his

life and what he had heard about him was horrible.

He hastened from the grave to his hotel and evaded reporters by telling them, untruthfully, that he was too overcome by sorrow to talk for publication. They made a column out of that.

By keeping to his rooms and asking the hotel to refuse admission to persons who wished to see him, he avoided callers until the following afternoon when he was visited by three members of the firm of lawyers employed by his uncle, to read him the will. It appeared that Peter Brooks had made all arrangements for "small" gifts before his death and the total of these were about a hundred thousand dollars, thus the will was a simple document with only one beneficiary, himself.

It appeared that there were some thirty million dollars' worth of bonds and interest-bearing securities apart from the stock of the Brooks Motor Company which was estimated at sixty millions. There was more than a million dollars in cash lying in banks.

The stock of the motor company was placed in the hands of directors who had full authority to operate the concern without interference from the heir, but who must pay all earnings to Glenn Brooks. The Brooks Motor Corporation had been owned entirely by Peter Brooks except a few shares given to the officers of the corporation as was necessary under the law. There were no strings to the bequest, no conditions, no regulation of his manner of disposing of his wealth. Everything was up to Glenn Brooks.

"You will have an income from your properties after taxes are paid of about three million dollars a year," said Mr. Gilbert Walker, head of the law firm. "It's a great responsibility, young man."

"I can't get used to it," Glenn said with a faint smile. "I can't understand it. My uncle was not on good terms with my parents, and I never saw or heard from him myself."

"He was a strange man," Mr. Walker replied. "Nobody understood him very well. He had no intimates."

"Well, I'll try to be worthy of his confidence in me."

"I'm sure you will. Now I am instructed to deliver you a letter in your uncle's own handwriting which, perhaps, will explain his reasons for making you his sole heir. Read it at your leisure. It's quite a long letter. Meanwhile you may draw upon the Bank of Chicago for any amount you may desire pending filing of the will and turning over to you the estate. I wish you good afternoon, and I hope we shall have the honor of acting for you as we did for your uncle."

"I'm sure I know of no better representatives," he murmured, but his eyes were glued upon the long envelope addressed to him in a hand which was totally unfamiliar. They bowed themselves out and Glenn opened a most amazing missive. It began in small but easily legible script:

MY DEAR NEPHEW:

When you receive this you will have heard my will and learned that you are my sole heir. Undoubtedly you have grown up hating me as did your father and mother and, perhaps, are now indulging in maudlin sorrow that you and they misjudged me so sorely. I am amused to think that this is so.

Your father I considered my enemy from the moment I found him the favorite of my parents. He was always the golden-haired boy, I was the disregarded one. He was big and strong for his age, I was puny. He got the toys I wanted, I was an afterthought with my parents. As we grew up I found him always in my way.

Perhaps I was a mean, spiteful child, but I was made so by circumstances over which I had no control. He was popular with the other boys and I was disliked by them no matter how I tried to please them. He was good-looking, I was ugly. He was skillful at games and I was inept. He was smug, good-natured and stupid. At five years I had more brains than he at ten. When we grew up enough to be interested in girls, he was always chosen by those I admired.

If he had treated me in kind I would have respected him more than to have him ignore my gibes and forgive me for the tricks I played on him. You probably consider this all very silly, but I assure you it was frightfully serious with me. My dislike for Elbert grew into violent hatred. I believe I would have killed him if it had been safe.

However, all this was as nothing compared to what happened when we grew to young manhood: for I fell in love with a girl and she repulsed me and married him. This was the first and only love of my life. My sufferings cannot be described and I ardently desired to murder them both. Sometimes I wish I had done so.

I left Elmhurst, which I hated with all its inhabitants, and I came to Chicago where I prospered mightily. I heard that Elbert and Ellen had a son and I hated him. I still do. Do not imagine I am dying filled with remorse, trying to make up to the son for my treatment of his father. I followed your career and hoped you would turn out badly because it would make them suffer as I have suffered, but you seem to have behaved yourself. It looked to me as though you would live contentedly in Elmhurst, marry some girl and settle down to a placid existence; and this exasperated me very much.

It is my desire to revenge myself upon you for the grievance I hold against your parents. That is why I have left you an estate which must be worth more than ninety million dollars. Perhaps you assume I am crazy. Perhaps I am, though nobody in this city thinks so.

Did you ever hear of Midas, the old Greek king whose touch turned everything to gold? He was accursed, my dear nephew.

There is nothing so completely demoralizing to a young man as a great fortune. Millions, when dearly earned and coming in middle or old age, may be a delight and a comfort, but to a youth they spell destruction. They are going to ruin you. You will become a libertine, a drunkard, an utterly useless creature and you will probably die before you are forty.

You will never have a true friend. You will be victimized and jobbed and robbed and rooked. You will have your confidence betrayed, you will be infested with parasites, you will never know love of woman. You can never

hear a girl tell you she loves you without suspecting her of trying to get your money. You will be unhappy, you will try to amuse yourself and find that there is no amusement for a multimillionaire. You will plunge into dissipation, you will lose your health, your hopes, your religion. You will become—well, we'll see.

It amuses me to think of the son of Elbert Brooks carrying the load of ninety million dollars left him by his dear uncle. I am chuckling as I write. There may be young men in the world with sufficiently strong characters to escape the curse of Midas, but not you. You are the son of Elbert Brooks who was a stupid fool. You are probably a stupid fool. I am betting ninety million dollars on it. What are you going to do about it, nephew? I hope I will be permitted to watch your career from the place where I am going. So dry your tears for your dear, generous uncle.

PETER BROOKS.

GLENN had begun to read this letter in the mood which his uncle had prophesied, but the attack upon his parents had caused him to redden with indignation, and when he came to the explanation of his inheritance his eyes were flashing with fury.

He dropped the letter in loathing. "The filthy old villain," he exclaimed aloud. "Oh, the scoundrel! The vicious, disgusting old brute. To hell with his money. I'll not touch a cent of it. If there is a place of eternal punishment he's there now, and there must be a hell for men like him."

Tears were streaming down his cheeks, tears of anger. His fists clenched at the thought of the reflections upon his father. No son of Elbert Brooks could be strong enough to carry such a burden? The great inheritance was due to insane spite. He wanted to ruin his brother's son, to make him a libertine, a drunkard. Well, he would give the money to charity and go back to the law office in Elmhurst.

He walked up and down the room excitedly. To think of a man carrying hatred so far. And even in his letter Uncle Peter had not been able to ad-

vance any reason for it. Glenn's father had been good-looking and popular, good-natured and forgiving, and Peter hated him for that. He had won the girl that Peter wanted. How lucky for her.

Glenn shuddered at the thought that his mother might have married Peter and been unhappy all her life. Peter had been a fiend. He had amassed a great fortune because he was relentless, remorseless, unscrupulous and probably dishonest. His father had died poor but honored, so loved that his mother had not survived him long. Peter had been disappointed because their son seemed to be a decent citizen, and had dumped this money on him to destroy him. A drunkard. A libertine!

Suddenly Glenn stopped his mad walk. How the old man would laugh in his place of punishment if his nephew feared this test. Wouldn't his father have said that nothing could make the right kind of man go wrong?

It was all true enough, what Peter had declared, regarding the curse of Midas; how gold would corrupt his relations with the world. In the last few days he had seen something of that—the absurd kowtowing to an insignificant young man from the country just because he was immensely rich. He had seen the calculating looks cast at him by women in the church, in the very presence of his uncle's coffin. He would be pursued, flattered, despoiled. He could trust nobody. He would never know love of woman.

Glenn looked around and his eyes rested upon a small black book lying upon a bureau. It was a Bible, gift of the Gideons, to be found in most hotel rooms in this country. He moved over to the bureau, laid his hand upon the book, lifted up his eyes.

"I hereby take my solemn oath never to touch a drop of liquor, never to have anything to do with loose women, never to let this money warp my judgment or inflate my self-esteem, so help me God."

Then he turned to the spot upon the floor where lay the white pages in the script of Peter Brooks.

"Now you damned old devil," he exclaimed, "let's see if I am going to become a drunkard and a libertine! I take your dare! I take your ninety million dollars and I'll show you that your brother's son is as good a man as he was. The curse of Midas? I'll make a blessing out of it. See if I don't."

CHAPTER III.

THE VULTURES GATHER.

GLENN BROOKS went downstairs to dinner. People in the lobby whispered and stared. The head waiter bent double upon his entrance into the dining room, and as he followed the man he saw that every eye was upon him. He was red to the ears when he seated himself in a corner and picked up the menu. The waiter addressed him as Mr. Brooks as respectfully as he would have addressed a king. A clergyman appeared from somewhere and extended a plump white hand.

"My dear Mr. Brooks," he said. "Permit me to extend to you my hearty congratulations. I am Reverend Norwood Gallup, pastor of the Forward Church, and I knew your uncle very well. A splendid man. I often appealed to him, and never in vain."

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Gallup?" Glenn said politely. "So my uncle was very liberal. I did not know him at all, sir."

Mr. Gallup seated himself. He knew that a score envied his easy approach and successful self-introduction to the young Cræsus.

"I am dining with friends," he said. "Won't you join us?"

"No, thank you. Say, Mr. Gallup, what would you do with a great fortune if it was suddenly handed to you?"

The minister's eyes sparkled. "There

are so many things. I would try to do good with it. Charity, my dear sir. The poor we have always with us."

"Do you think it would ruin you?"

"Most certainly not. I should not change my manner of living, but I should be able to set upon their feet certain worthy charities that are starving for lack of support."

"Such as what?"

"Many churches are—er—in need of repairs. For example, we need a new roof, and—er—"

"You wouldn't resign from the ministry and start a career of spending?"

Mr. Gallup seemed pained at the change of subject. "Indeed, no. Of course I have always longed to see the world. I might indulge myself with a little travel, but I would always remember that others are suffering."

"But I have been told that the poor don't get a very large percentage of charity donations. It is eaten up by overhead and organization expenses."

"Nonsense. It is necessary, of course, to have paid workers, and one must be careful to see that those who are helped are worthy."

"What do you mean by worthy?"

"Why—er—worthy. Persons who are in dire want through no fault of their own."

"I get you. What would you advise me to do with my money?"

Mr. Gallup's smile was heavenly.

"If you will give me an appointment I shall be pleased to discuss it at length. You could establish an institution for betterment with a competent director. That is all important. You must not permit your money to be squandered. I might even, yes, I might even consent to direct such a foundation myself."

"Just leave me your card," said Glenn with a smile. "I can promise you the new roof. I'll have to think over the foundation."

Mr. Gallup shook hands so effusively that broad smiles spread around the dining room. Glenn heard a few deri-

sive titters. Evidently these busybodies supposed that Gallup had made a big touch and the word would go round that an easy mark had come to town. Well, the man would have his roof, but he was too ready to assume the directorship of one more charitable foundation. He thought Mr. Gallup a trifle oily, and regretted that he had invited him to sit down.

THE mail next morning brought him a hundred letters, which he regarded in dismay. The first dozen were all beggars. Some were from big institutions, schools, colleges, various good-doing enterprises. Some were from unknown individuals asking small sums and claiming dire want. As he had nothing to do, he went through the entire pile.

There were circulars from every sort of business concern which might appeal to rich men, outfitters, tailors, yacht manufacturers, automobile concerns, public balls; and there were one or two propositions to back theatrical propositions, but most were more or less impudent demands for donations.

"A new sucker on the scene," he said with a grin. After all, Glenn was a Yankee.

His prohibition of the telephone still continued; only his lawyers were to be connected with his rooms, but men and women solicitors ran the gantlet of the office and knocked on his door, to be dismissed with great difficulty.

Like any healthy young man, he hated seclusion, but he grew afraid to venture out. One excursion through the hotel lobby caused him to be accosted by three or four strangers, who apparently had been lurking there awaiting his appearance. All were beggars.

WHEN Mr. Walker called on him, about three o'clock, he told him of the events of the day, and the lawyer laughed heartily.

"The penalty of great wealth," he

declared. "Every rich man gets an enormous mail, and what came to-day is nothing to what will come to-morrow. You are young, unaccustomed to wealth, and you look to the grafters like something very soft. You will have to employ a secretary to go over your letters and throw about ninety-nine per cent of them in the wastebasket. Some multimillionaires have to hire bouncers to get rid of the personal solicitors."

"Was my uncle very liberal?"

"Not so anybody could notice it! They couldn't reach him, for one thing. He lived in a club and he had a couple of private detectives to accompany him when he went out. At his office, of course, he was perfectly protected."

"Mr. Walker, what did you think of my uncle? Was he quite sane?"

"I should say so. He was vindictive, relentless, but tremendously sagacious. Why? Was there something in the letter to make you think he was a bit off?"

"Well—"

"You needn't be afraid. Nobody could break the will, and if they did the estate would go to you anyway as his only relative."

"He hated my father, and he told me in the letter he left me his fortune because he hoped it would ruin me."

"Hum. Nice Christian spirit. Well, you'll fool him."

"How long have I got to hang around Chicago?"

"You can sign certain papers in the morning. Why go away?"

"Because I can't stand this sort of thing."

"There is no way to escape it. Wherever you go your approach will be advertised. You'll be news for quite awhile yet. If you move, you just bring down on yourself a new crop of reporters and a new gang of beggars."

"I didn't know the human race was so disgusting," he said bitterly.

"Now don't let it get your goat. If you show them that you are not con-

tributing to anything they'll let up on you after awhile. However, you can't escape being chased by people who want to get something out of you. The women started in yet?"

"No, thank God."

"You look out for them. If you say 'how-do-you-do' to a woman you are likely to let yourself in for a breach of promise suit. Above all, keep away from stage people. Those girls would sue you for the publicity. And lookout for frame-ups."

"What do you mean?"

"Various forms of the badger game. You know what that is?"

"I'm studying law. But, darn it, can't I do anything or go anywhere?"

"Come out to my house for dinner to-night. Just a family party. Pot luck."

"I'll be delighted," he said gratefully. "I'm eating my meals in my room."

"Seven o'clock. Here is the address."

AT seven o'clock Glenn Brooks presented himself at the address on the Drive which the lawyer had given him. It was a large house, brilliantly lighted, and at first he thought he had made an error, but the butler reassured him. He was escorted into the drawing-room, where twenty people in evening dress stopped their chatter to stare at him to his intense embarrassment. He had not brought evening clothes with him, had not worn a tuxedo for six months in Elmhurst, and it had not occurred to him that one dressed when taking pot luck at lawyer Walker's home.

Walker bustled forward; he wore a tail coat with white necktie, as did several other men. He drew forth a very plump woman with heavy shoulders and bosom emerging from a black lace gown, who greeted him with effusion.

"This is a great honor, Mr. Brooks," she gurgled. "It happened we were

having a few friends to-night and we are all delighted that you are joining us."

"I didn't think to dress," he murmured.

"Why, it was just careless of Mr. Walker not to tell you. It's your fault, you bad boy," she said, raising a fat finger rebukingly at her husband. He had a guilty look, and Glenn knew that the fiery cross had been sent around Chicago to summon the clan for this festivity.

And now there were introductions to over-cordial men and simpering women. There were several very pretty girls present, but Glenn was too angry and embarrassed to appreciate them. There were cocktails and an astonished protest when he refused one; however, they dared not insist too much.

Presently they went in to dinner. Glenn sat between Mrs. Walker and her niece, Miss Mabel Fillmore, a really beautiful girl, blond, young, exquisitely gowned, who smiled at him demurely.

"Frame-up," he thought savagely. "Walker trimmed me. This is his niece and they dug her up so I would fall in love with her. He's as bad as any of them."

The curse of Midas was working. Had he met Mabel Fillmore under any other circumstances he would have blessed the day, because she was lovely and sweet and the type of girl he most admired; but he was weighed down with ninety million dollars and he considered her a fortune hunter. Suspicious already, as Uncle Peter had predicted.

Conversation around the table was brisk, Glenn thought it hectic, and he was aware that all eyes were fixed on him, although they looked away politely when he caught them at it. These people were comfortably well off, probably had all the money they really needed; why the deuce were they thrilled to be dining with the proprietor of ninety million dollars? They did

not expect him to give them any of it. A week ago none of these people would have considered him worthy of notice, yet he was just the same person, a trifle like a hick and the only one present not properly arrayed.

MRS. WALKER tried to draw him out; he answered curtly. Miss Fillmore ventured a few remarks about golf and tennis and he was almost rude. Walker created interest by telling some of Glenn Brooks's troubles with professional donation hunters and they all exhibited indignation; but, to himself, Glenn was saying that they needn't take that attitude, because they were nearly as bad.

He had a lively sense of humor and a gift for conversation; had he been just Glenn Brooks dining with these people he probably would have done a little better than hold his own. As it was, Miss Fillmore privately voted him a poor fish and finally gave her entire attention to the person on her left, while Mrs. Walker's efforts to make him talk gave her a headache.

At last coffee arrived and ended the dinner, and the party drifted back into the drawing-room, where things were just as stiff as at table. Several persons did express the hope that they would see more of him, but, as Glenn did not make the sort of reply that would draw a definite invitation, they had to let it go at that. Mabel Fillmore did not come near him after dinner, and Walker sensed that his client resented his "pot luck" invitation and was frightened.

As a matter of fact the lawyer had intended a family dinner when he issued the invitation, but Mrs. Walker had sounded the loud timbrel and invited everybody she wished to impress, to meet the heir to ninety millions. If Brooks was angry about it, he promised himself to murder Mrs. Walker.

Glenn made his escape about ten thirty and reached his hotel without further incident. The poison in his

uncle's letter was working. He was convinced that nobody was sincere. He had been considering escaping to Elmhurst, but he loved Elmhurst and respected many persons who lived there. Now he dreaded lest these, too, proceed to fawn and caper around him. If well-to-do people in a city like Chicago made fools of themselves over a boy who was nothing but a millionaire how could he expect the folks at home to behave as if nothing had happened?

Perhaps he might have enjoyed his celebrity had it not been for the statements in that cursed letter. He might have considered that Mabel Fillmore was attracted by his personality as well as his wealth, but already the money had smothered his personality; all people who looked at him could see was a few tons of gold.

He did not hire a secretary, but allowed the mail to accumulate until it half-filled his drawing-room and then he told the maid to carry it all away unopened. He was pestered by the Rev. Gallup, whom he finally told to present a bill for his church roof and show himself no more. Other pests descended upon him, and attractive women attempted to scrape acquaintance with him.

The climax came when a Sunday newspaper appeared with a full page special headed, "Richest bachelor in America may soon seek a bride." It was illustrated with half a dozen pictures of Glenn Brooks, snapped when walking, sitting down, getting into a cab, getting out of one, and written in a sickeningly sentimental manner. That night Glenn Brooks disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

POOR LITTLE RICH BOY.

ABOUT twenty-four hours after the sudden departure of Glenn Brooks from Chicago, a vanishment which perplexed and annoyed the newspapers because they had not been

consulted or informed where he was going, a young man rented a room in a nicely furnished lodging house on West End Avenue just south of One Hundred and Tenth Street, New York. He took a front parlor which had an alcove bedchamber and agreed to pay twenty-five dollars per week for this choice apartment.

His name, so he said, was George Phillips, his residence, Boston, and his occupation, writer. In appearance he looked exactly like Glenn Brooks and that is exactly who he was.

Glenn had decided to escape the notoriety which overwhelmed him in Chicago and to fool Peter Brooks. It seemed to him that the perils which beset the multimillionaire were due entirely to the fact that he was known to be such, therefore the thing to do was to go where he was not known and to live like a normal human being upon whatever part of his income he actually needed until he found out what to do with the surplus.

He had dropped a line to Walker to the effect that he was leaving Chicago for awhile, had cashed a check for ten thousand dollars and packed a small bag. He asked the hotel to store his trunks containing an expensive wardrobe acquired during his residence there and took a taxi to the railroad station in time to catch a night train for Cleveland. Apparently he was not trailed; in truth the newspapers had wearied of him and called off their men, and in Cleveland he boarded a New York express unrecognized. It had been absurdly easy.

He didn't know what he was going to do in New York, but he hoped to be let alone and for a few days he got his wish.

Like the Rev. Gallup, Glenn Brooks yearned to see the world and his first thought when he heard of his inheritance was that now he might go everywhere: South Seas, lands of romance; Europe, mecca of the traveling American; South America, mysterious and

alluring; China, weird and wonderful; India, indescribably picturesque; but what had happened to him in Chicago ruined that hope.

To go abroad he must apply for a passport which would identify him and his name would appear on steamship passenger lists. He did not know that celebrated people are able to arrange with the steamship lines to keep their names off the printed lists. And once he was locked up in a ship with a mob of passengers who knew who he was, the same disgusting toadying would begin.

Poor Glenn did not yet know that there are people who are utterly indifferent to the glamour of enormous wealth—in truth there are not many, but some exist. He was not even aware that there were quantities of persons who were so wealthy themselves that they would not be impressed by the heir of Peter Brooks, and some so aristocratic that they would ignore him despite his fortune because he did not belong to their set. Glenn was nice, but very young, and still suffering from the effects of that diabolical letter.

He gave out that he was a writer because he wished people to suppose he worked for his living and needed some manner to explain his lack of office employment, and he selected a lodging house because he feared recognition if he installed himself in a hotel.

Who has not dreamed of a legacy which would enable him to throw up his job and to live at his ease for the rest of his life without ever having to worry about the cost of living? Who among the young has not assumed that a life of leisure would be perfect bliss?

And how many of those who work and yearn are aware that it requires very special training to be a drone instead of a busy bee?

Glenn Brooks was a level-headed, clean-living and more than ordinarily intelligent youth; but he nourished all the delusions of his years.

Brought up in genteel poverty, he

was able to graduate from Yale because he eked out what his parents were able to give him by doing odd jobs about the college and in town. He had waited on table, worked nights in a haberdashery, tended furnaces, delivered milk, and otherwise occupied the hours not required for classes and study.

All the time he had envied the gilded youths who ran around in sport roadsters, wore classy clothes, lived in luxurious dormitories, and amused themselves outside of class hours without thought of expense. He had envied their future.

While he must make his own way in the world, these young men had everything arranged for them; most of them need never work at all. They would travel, play golf and tennis, move from New York to Florida in cold weather, go north in summer, marry whom they pleased without wondering if they could afford matrimony; in short the world belonged to them.

Not for one minute did he doubt that he could adapt himself to such a life, nor did he know that one must be born to the purple to wear it without boredom.

EVEN now he had not learned that he was ill-suited for such a life. If he had inherited one million instead of ninety, he might have stepped right into the swim as he put it; look up his classmates, prove to them that he could hold up his end of expenses and live delightfully in Newport, Bar Harbor and Palm Beach.

But he had been cheated by his wicked old uncle. His gigantic fortune marked him miserably. His identity could not be concealed if he sought his classmates. It would be Chicago all over again.

In a year or two perhaps he might come out of his shell, but for the present the thing to do was to lie low. After all, New York was a mighty city, full of interest and entertainment. He had money to burn, leisure to enjoy,

and there was no reason why he could not have a lot of innocent fun.

At Glenn's age, charity and good works do not have the appeal that comes to people of middle age and gray hairs, and while Glenn would help worthy cases which came to his attention he had not settled down in New York for the purpose of alleviating any suffering but his own.

For a few days he enjoyed himself, for he visited the Metropolitan Museum, the Public Library, Columbia University, Grant's Tomb, the Statue of Liberty, the docks, the Bowery, Brooklyn Bridge—although New York has half a dozen bridges bigger than the old one with the stone towers, it is the only bridge which is advertised in the hinterland. He rode down Fifth Avenue and up Riverside Drive upon the top of a bus, explored the subways, and attended a theater every night and on afternoons when there were matinees.

He sought adventure. In fiction he had read that heroines were to be met in subway trains and upon the top of busses, and he kept his eyes open. The sort of girls who pleased him, however, appeared not to be aware of his existence.

In a week he was fed up with the attractions of New York, lonely, unable to dispose of his time. He might have secured law books and continued his study, but to what end? To make money? He had all the money in the world. The law was heavy, dreary; he had never had a zest for it, but it appealed to him more than teaching or preaching or medicine and he had no taste for commerce.

His ambition would have forced him to plug at the law, but wealth had killed ambition.

Temptation came to him to move to an exclusive hotel and sign his name on the register. In twenty-four hours he would have acquaintances galore; doors of great houses would open to him, some of those houses and Park

Avenue apartments which he had inspected from the omnibus and taxis, and regarding whose inmates he had speculated idly. After all, he was a voluntary recluse in New York. But recollection of the prophecy of Uncle Peter restrained him. Even though he had taken an oath, how did he know he could keep it?

A score of people lived in the lodging house, most of whom he had never seen, and those he had met in the hallway were uninteresting old ladies, old or middle-aged men. Glenn had heard that New York was the most unfriendly city in the world, and it certainly was living up to its reputation.

During his first ten days he delighted in lunching and dining in different cafés and restaurants, but he usually breakfasted in a neat little lunchroom on One Hundred and Tenth Street. There were only two waitresses, both plain but efficient, and a small spare gray man who acted as cashier, but who seemed to be the proprietor. Through the swinging door he had caught a glimpse of the cook, a plump, motherly old lady who he decided must be the wife of the proprietor.

The food was excellent, the sort of cooking that he had enjoyed when his father and mother were alive; the prices were very low. He couldn't see how they paid expenses. Gradually he acquired a speaking acquaintance with the old man, just a passing of the time of day. He realized that business was not good in the little café, and he began to drop in for lunch or dinner when his fury of sight-seeing was spent.

CHAPTER V.

PLAYING HAROUN AL RASCHID.

AND one night something happened. He arrived late for dinner, the few diners were at their dessert, and the moment he seated himself he sensed that something was

wrong in the place. The old man sat upon his stool behind the cash register with a blank look in his eye. The waitresses were morose, and every now and then the old lady in the kitchen cast a glance through the swinging door toward her husband. He read anxiety in the look, and the last time he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

The cause of the trouble he diagnosed to be a man who sat at a table near the cashier's desk. He was a fat, unshaved, unclean and surly individual, with a pair of small mean eyes and the mouth of a pig. Although he had long finished his dinner, he sat on and picked his teeth with a metal toothpick and sucked them loudly and disgustingly.

Glenn beckoned to his waitress and whispered, "Who is that fellow?"

The girl scowled. "Can't you tell by looking at him? It's the finish of Pa and Ma Milligan."

"But who is he?"

"A keeper."

Glenn nodded understandingly. So the old couple had failed. Despite their ability to run a model little restaurant they had been unable to meet their bills and some of their creditors had attached the place. Too bad. He had liked the atmosphere of the café, he had liked, without knowing, the Milligans, and now their chapter was finished. He knew their story well enough. Hopefully they had invested their life's savings in this place; they had worked fourteen hours a day and probably worried the other ten hours and the end was failure. Glenn beckoned to the old man who shambled over to the table.

"You have a keeper in the place?" he asked.

Milligan nodded. "We did the best we could," he said. "I guess we're licked."

"How much do you owe that fellow?"

"Two hundred and ten dollars."

Glenn drew a roll of bills from his pocket and drew off two hundreds and a ten. "Pay him off," he commanded.

The old man glanced at him, startled. "Why—what—how can you—"

"It's all right. Get him out. He is spoiling my dinner."

Mr. Milligan seated himself opposite the would-be benefactor. "Say, mister," he said. "It's good of you. I don't know how to thank you—but I can't take your money. It's no use."

"Why not?"

"Because this isn't all we owe. Let the news get round that we paid off the provision man and three or four other creditors will get a judgment against us. Besides, we might as well quit. The place is losing money."

"How much do you owe altogether?" demanded Glenn.

"Nine hundred sixty dollars."

"How much are you dropping a week?"

"Fifty or sixty dollars."

"Tell you what I'll do," declared the young man. "I'll give you the money to pay them all off and you give me your note."

The pale, discouraged eyes of the proprietor filled, and he sniffed while his Adam's apple climbed up and down his throat. "I can't do it, sir," he said finally. "I couldn't meet the note and that's why I won't let you lose your money."

"The woman in the kitchen is your wife, isn't she?"

"Yes, sir."

"What's going to become of you both?"

MR. MILLIGAN made a weak gesture. "Poorhouse, I guess."

"Don't give up the ship," said Glenn briskly, trying hard to hide his own emotion. "I'm going to take your note, but you have got to let me tell you how to make this place pay."

"We tried. People won't come in. We give them good food as cheap as anybody."

"Ah," laughed Glenn, "that's the trouble. It's so cheap they won't believe it's good. You must raise your prices."

"You don't know business," said the old man sadly. "Then nobody would come."

"I've got an idea," the youth exclaimed. "I've been coming in here because the cooking was like my mother's. Capitalize that. Will you do what I tell you?"

"I'll give you a half interest in the place and do anything you say, but I warn you it's no use."

"Get that fellow out of here. Pay him off," commanded Glenn.

Milligan took the money and walked with dignity toward the keeper. "Here's your money. Give me a receipt," he declared.

"Nix," retorted the keeper. "I'm comfortable. You got to slip me twenty for myself to make me move."

Milligan looked distressed. "That is unfair. I'm paying you your judgment and costs. Just what the court order said."

"Twenty in my fist," replied the fat man.

Glenn, who knew enough law to know the fellow was blackmailing, now entered the argument.

"Call the police station, Mr. Milligan, and ask them to send some men around here to throw this rowdy out."

"Hey, you, what you butting in for?" demanded the keeper truculently. "I'm an officer of the law, young fellow, and don't you get gay with me."

"I'm a lawyer," replied Glenn untruthfully. "And you are a dirty blackmailer. You beat it before the cops come or I'll have your badge torn off your coat."

"Look here. I been hanging out in this hash house all day. I'm entitled to something for my trouble," he whined.

"Your fee is included in the bill. Receipt it and get out."

With a grumbling and growling the brute signed a receipt and pocketed the money, then slammed the front door after a parting shot.

"I'll be back to-morrow with another judgment, mister."

Milligan groaned. "You just wasted your money, Mr.—I don't even know your name."

"Er—George Phillips."

"I certainly thank you, Mr. Phillips."

"We'll pay your bills first thing in the morning," declared Glenn.

The café was now entirely empty, save for Glenn and the proprietor and Mrs. Milligan, who stood at the pantry door, watching the departure of the keeper, half joyful, half perplexed.

"Come in, ma, and meet Mr. Phillips," called the old man. "Mr. Phillips is paying off our bills and taking a half interest in the café."

Mrs. Milligan, wiping her hands on an apron which managed to be clean despite her proximity to a kitchen stove, approached slowly.

"It's good of you, Mr. Phillips," she said with an unmistakable New Hampshire accent, "only I hope my husband told you that we are losing money. I am afraid a half interest in this restaurant is worthless."

"It isn't going to be if you will do what I say. Besides, I am not taking a half interest. I am loaning the money to clear up your indebtedness and enough to make certain improvements, and you and Mr. Milligan will pay me back with interest when you are able."

THE old lady looked at him in astonishment. She was a very sweet old lady, he thought, for her white hair was beautiful, and her plump, rosy face pleasant to look upon. "But how can you afford to do this, and why do you do it?"

"I can afford it, and it's a whim. Now listen, both of you. We are going to move your kitchen into the win-

dow, and Mrs. Milligan is going to do her cooking in full view of the street."

"Oh, why, I couldn't do that," she exclaimed.

"Not even to save your business?" he asked craftily.

"But what good will that do?"

"We'll put up a sign which will read: 'Ma Milligan's Kitchen.' You'll only cook certain things, the sort of things people can't ordinarily get in restaurants. Roasts, right out of the oven, New England pies and cakes, real Boston baked beans, doughnuts, old-fashioned cream chowders. You know how to cook those things, don't you, Mrs. Milligan?"

"And you're going to charge high prices, triple what you ask now," he continued. "Just to see Mrs. Milligan cooking in the window will make people think of home and mother, and they'll pay any price for your food. You see if they won't."

"My, but you are a clever boy," declared the old lady. "John, I'm sure he's right. The trouble with us was we tried to run a regular restaurant and there are a dozen of them on the block. This will be different. How did you ever think of it, Mr. Phillips?"

"Why, it's the secret of the success of the big chain lunch rooms. They have a man cooking buttercakes in the window and people rush in. A motherly woman will attract more than the sort of men they can hire to cook buttercakes."

"Just remember, Mr. Phillips," said Milligan, "that it will cost a lot of money to fix up a kitchen in the window. We can't use our equipment. It's old and not attractive. I guess it would cost a thousand dollars, maybe more."

"You order the things you need. I'll pay for them."

"Not unless you take a half interest in the place," the old man persisted.

"Oh, all right," laughed Glenn. "Another thing. You must hire some very pretty girls as waitresses. Pay

them more than you pay ordinary waitresses because they will be worth more. And tear out your present kitchen and use the space for your restaurant. You're going to need it."

"I wish I thought so," sighed the old man. "I'm afraid it's throwing good money after bad."

"Don't be a fool, John," snapped Mrs. Milligan. "This boy is a genius. But are you sure you can afford it, Mr. Phillips?"

He laughed. "I assure you I can afford to lose two or three thousand dollars."

"Then, God bless you for saving two helpless old people!" she exclaimed bursting into tears. She threw her apron over her face and rushed back to her kitchen.

"I'll be in first thing in the morning," said Glenn hastily, "with cash to pay all your bills. Have them ready."

The old man's face was working dangerously. "I'll have the papers drawn up selling you half the restaurant," he said chokingly. "Ma will pray for you to-night, Mr. Phillips."

"Oh, pshaw!" he exclaimed, trying to keep back his own tears. "Good night. See you at nine in the morning."

Once outside the café he strode rapidly toward his lodgings.

"Uncle Peter, you old demon!" he exclaimed. "I hope you are where you can learn how I spend your cursed money."

IN the morning Pa Milligan paid off his astonished creditors and then the place was closed for the alterations. Glenn had a real interest for the first time since he had come to New York, and he hung about supervising the changes. He began with the outside of the café which had a twenty-five-foot frontage, and he had carpenters make it look like the exterior of an old farmhouse with weather-beaten shingled sides. A replica of a real New England farmhouse kitchen was to be

seen by looking through the show window, with an oilcloth floor, a big coal stove, not a gas stove, kitchen table, whitewashed walls.

The partition of the old kitchen and pantry was torn down and the space added to the restaurant, the old equipment sold to a junk man. He sent away their big clumsy tables and replaced them with smaller ones covered with red tablecloths, and he hung on the wall old-fashioned pictures and mottoes, not forgetting, "God Bless Our Home."

There had been seating capacity for fifty people under the old arrangements, but the new restaurant would accommodate ninety. The Milligans stood around in growing terror at the recklessness of their new partner, and being honest people shuddered at the cost of things because they were by no means convinced that he could afford it.

When everything was ready, Glenn bought a new model phonograph with loud speaker and laid in "The Old Oaken Bucket," "Suwanee River," "Old Kentucky Home," and similar familiar records, the strains of which streaming into the street would cause the passer-by to stop and gaze at Ma Milligan in her kitchen, the personification of the spirit of home.

Milligan had estimated the cost of the improvements at a thousand dollars, but when the bills came in they exceeded six thousand. Glenn paid them with a laugh. He took Ma Milligan to a theatrical costumer's and dressed her up in the quaint costume of the nineties, but he allowed Pa Milligan to select the waitresses—and the old man proved to be a good picker. For the opening day Glenn insisted upon six waitresses, and events proved that he was right.

When the boarding was taken from the window, there was a hot fire in the stove; pots, filled with good things, simmered, a tea kettle steamed, and Ma Milligan was rolling piecrust at the kitchen table. A large supply of food

had been prepared in advance and was hidden in the pantry behind the window kitchen, which was fortunate, for the place was immediately mobbed.

From early morning until eight at night the customers came, and there was usually a line waiting. The food vanished, and they sent out to other restaurants for supplies, inferior cooking, but the atmosphere satisfied their customers. They would not be caught napping again.

At nine o'clock they shut the front door and then Pa Milligan had time to count up. During the day they had fed nine hundred people and had taken in fourteen hundred dollars.

"It's as much as we ever took in during a month," gasped the astonished old restaurant man.

"You must be tired ma," said Glenn sympathetically.

"Who, me? Young man, I never felt better in my life."

"Just the same you can't stand the strain of working in that kitchen all day. We've got to hire a couple of women to work under your direction while you sit down in plain sight. And during the slack hours you can leave the kitchen."

"I've got to go back now and cook a lot of stuff for to-morrow," said the indomitable old lady.

THEY got organized during the next few days, although business continued to tax their capacity, and at the end of a week they were employing ten waitresses, a couple of pantry-men, and three imitation Ma Milligans. The total receipts were six thousand dollars. The patrons were broadcasting the excellence of Ma Milligan's pies and cakes and chowders.

"In another week at this rate," said Pa Milligan, "we'll be able to return you the money you spent, Mr. Phillips. But all our days we'll bless you."

"When you return my investment I'll return you the half interest," Glenn informed them.

"You'll do nothing of the sort. I wouldn't be surprised if a half interest in this café would be worth fifty thousand a year," cried the old man.

Blub. Something exploded inside of Glenn Brooks. What did he care?

It had been a happy time for him, setting these people on their feet, trying out an idea of his own and working for its success. He had lost his self consciousness, forgotten Uncle Peter and his damning legacy, gone to bed tired out and full of enthusiasm, to sleep peacefully and dreamlessly; but now it was over.

There is nothing in this world so thrilling as achievement, and the man who sees his energy result in the only measure of success we know, money, is able to enjoy his winnings with a full heart. But what good is fifty thousand a year to a man with three millions a year? Why fight to get what one has already?

That night Glenn returned home as blue as though the Milligan Restaurant was in a receiver's hands. They didn't need him any more. The job was done. He was delighted that they were fixed for life; but what of himself?

Well, at least he had gained two devoted friends. The Milligans, who were upon the point of being objects of charity, had been helped to get on their feet and his apparent generosity had not cost him a cent. It had been fun while it lasted, his bread cast upon the water would return to him a hundred fold, but the darn stuff wouldn't be bread, it would be yellow gold. The touch of Midas. Everything turned to gold.

No, the friendship of the Milligans was honest and sincere. There was nothing metallic about that.

And then there occurred to Glenn a big idea. Suppose he continued to use his fortune in this way; to seek opportunities to benefit worthy folks without advertising or ostentation. To use his own energy to right things,

backed by Uncle Peter's money. His ideas wouldn't always turn out as profitable as the Milligan Kitchen had done, but the losses would not bother him, and it would keep him busy. He would cheat the demon uncle who certainly never expected his inheritance to be put to a good use.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRAIL.

THERE were people in Chicago who felt that it was very unfair to them that Glenn Brooks had taken French leave before they had a chance to profit by him. Mr. Walker was annoyed. Although the firm of which he was the senior member was as upright as lawyers can be and practice law, its members had been jubilant over the accession to the estate of Peter Brooks of a young and unsophisticated individual.

While acting for the old gentleman, they had drawn regular fees, but opportunities for large profits were denied them because Peter managed his own affairs with the utmost competence. Mr. Walker hoped to manage Glenn's finances, to advise him regarding changing of stocks into bonds and bonds into stocks in a manner to increase his income and decrease his income tax.

While Mr. Walker and his partners would do nothing that would not be beneficial—for as Mark Antony said about Brutus et al., they were honorable men—the selling of millions of dollars' worth of securities and purchase of millions more would bring them, in commissions and emoluments, a very large sum, for brokers would be glad to share profits with the managers of the Brooks estate. Mr. Walker had figured that he ought to make a hundred thousand dollars more per year for his firm from Glenn Brooks than he had secured from Peter Brooks.

Instead he had received a curt letter from Glenn to leave things as they were, to honor drafts signed by him, but to conceal his whereabouts if he desired to continue as the representative of the multimillionaire.

Mrs. Walker was furious, for she had hoped to elevate her social position through possession of a fabulously wealthy young bachelor, and eventually marry him to her niece, Mabel Fillmore. Glenn had seen through her with great accuracy.

The city editor of the *Chicago Blade* was very angry and fired the hotel reporter because he had failed to get a tip that Glenn Brooks was departing, refusing to listen to that unfortunate man's protest that he assumed special men were assigned to keep tabs on Brooks.

"This guy is big news and he's going to be bigger," said the city room autocrat to the managing editor. "With all his coin he's going to step into trouble wherever he goes. There are going to be 'doings.' No kid with ninety million dollars can go straight, and, if he tried, all the crooks in the country would see that he didn't.

"Women are going to be all over him. Breach of promise, love nests, wild scenes, orgies, poison plots, suicide threats, even murders are in the offing. It takes an old crab like Peter Brooks to handle a great fortune. This child is going to be taken. And we let him slip out of our fingers."

"Where did he go?" asked the managing editor curtly.

"Can't find out. Took a train for Cleveland and vanished into thin air."

"Well, locate him," said the boss. "You're right that he's going to get into messes. Hot stuff is likely to break at any time. Why did he go into hiding?"

"Probably pestered to death."

"Most kids would like the notoriety. This fellow is unusual. Most likely he has assumed the rôle of 'incognito,' like a European king on his travels,

but he couldn't get out of the country without applying for a passport and the papers would get that."

"Can I spend money?"

The managing editor considered. "Yes. Within reason."

"Well, his lawyers know where he is. I want to bribe somebody in their office to slip me his address. Then I'll assign a man to trail him even if he goes to Timbuctoo."

"Hum. Why a man? He might get suspicious of a man. Although there are plenty of women working on newspaper staffs nowadays, the public is still surprised to meet a woman reporter. Couldn't that Lester girl do the job?"

"Good Lord, no. That gushing, gurgling, messy-looking sob sister!"

"You're right, though she's a good reporter. Listen, how about Lily Lockhart; she's a peach. Has she sense enough to handle an assignment like this?"

"I am inclined to think so," said the city editor. "She has only been in the business a year, but she has brought in several big stories, she writes nicely and she's got a level head."

"All right. Find the young idiot and sic Lily on him."

LILY LOCKHART got her assignment three or four days later. She came on duty at 10 A.M. and found a torn slip of copy paper in her mail box with the curt injunction, "See me. B. M." The initials stood for Bert Madden, the city editor.

Miss Lockhart was an unusual sight in a newspaper city room. It is strange that reporting has never appealed to really beautiful women although it is a profession in which loveliness would be sure to win. Perhaps it is that reporting is very hard work, perhaps it is that beauty and brains do not go together, but I think the real reason is that very pretty women find the world a soft, downy cushion, that things come so easily to them that they get lazy,

and some man grabs them and marries them while still young.

Those who survive the masculine rush find the stage more attractive than newspaper work, for there beauty is displayed in entrancing settings, work is light, pay is good and gets very much better if they have any talent at all. Anyway the peaches keep away from newspaper shops—except now and then.

Lily Lockhart did her best to tone down her destructiveness. She had her bright yellow hair tucked away beneath a shapeless pot hat and she wore a tailor-made suit of some coarse brown material, and she had on black stockings and sensible shoes. This was bad enough, but she also wore a pair of bow spectacles which deformed her pretty nose and there was not a vestige of rouge on her cheeks or lipstick on her lips.

Nevertheless, and just the same, everybody in the *Blade* office knew that she was a riproaring dazzler and those who had seen her in evening dress acted as though they were intoxicated for days afterward.

Her eyes were brown and round; perhaps she was near-sighted, but an office boy who had retrieved her glasses tried them on and asserted that the lenses were nothing but window glass. Even the loose, mannish cut suit, the man's soft collar and masculine four-in-hand tie did not completely defeminize her. A figure could be discerned beneath that disguise which high-salaried show girls would envy.

Nobody knew much about Lily. She had come in a year ago and applied for a job, and Bert Madden, who hated the sight of women in a newspaper office like nearly all oldtimers—survivors of the days of shirt sleeves, poker, booze and profanity—had dismissed her brusquely. Next day she was back with the story of a bank defalcation, the name of the embezzler, picture of his wife, total amount stolen, and what was being done by the bank to catch him.

To win public confidence banks try to create the impression that it is impossible to steal from them, and when a robbery does take place they hush it up as much as possible. Usually they do not even inform the police, but set their own high-priced and capable detectives upon the trail of the defaulter. If they catch him and recover the money they have to let the news get out, but point with pride to the fact that he did not get away with it and will go to prison for a long term. But if they don't get their hands on him they stand the loss in haughty silence.

The *Blade* had a hint of this defalcation, but its best men had been unable to get any information, nor had the reporters from the other Chicago papers; so Bert Madden swallowed his prejudices, grabbed this lady go-getter, put her on the staff and beat the town with her story.

Lily was the most businesslike woman who ever entered the *Blade* office. She did not gush, she did not vamp, she banged out her stuff on an office typewriter; and they were good stories. She did not smoke cigarettes and put her feet on the desks and encourage the boys to tell naughty stories, as did some other newspaper girls in the hope of being accepted as one of the gang. She refused to dine with the managing editor. She kept the lady-killers of the office at arm's length, and she minded her own business.

MADDEN knew she lived at a small hotel not far from the *Blade* office, and once she had told him that she was a graduate of a California university, but she had a way of discouraging interrogation without being snippy, which was most effective. Without question she was a newspaper "nut" for she loved to hang around the plant, sought opportunities to go into the composing room, and accepted night assignments eagerly when she was supposed to be off duty.

The reporters knew she had society

friends and the musical critic had spotted her in a box at the opera upon several occasions, gowned as tastefully as the wealthy women in whose company she was, and looking infinitely more beautiful than they.

At the end of three months they respected her and admired her. They did not know her, yet she was not dismissed as a snob. There was something very nice about Lily Lockhart.

"I've got a wonderful assignment for you, Miss Lockhart," began the city editor. "You will have to go to New York and you may be months on the job, but you will have an unlimited expense account and most likely a very pleasant time."

"You mean I shall be out of the office for months?" she asked in pretty dismay. "I do not think I shall like that, Mr. Madden."

"Ah, but you are working on a whale of a story. You know about Glenn Brooks?"

"The millionaire?"

"Yep. He left town suddenly and nobody has been able to find him. Now Brooks is in New York. He is living in a lodging house on West End Avenue under an assumed name, and we want to know what he is up to."

"Really?" she exclaimed with a rare smile. "Probably the poor boy wants to be let alone."

"The penalty of ninety million dollars is that you can't be let alone," grinned Madden. "Now here's the idea. You get a room in the lodging house. Make his acquaintance, find out what he is thinking about, and what he intends to do. But don't send it."

"Don't send it? Then why assign me to the story?"

"Wait until you have a front page smash. Sure as fate, something big will happen in connection with that kid. He's too young to be turned loose with all that money. The crooks will be after him, the dames will be down on him, you can't tell what nasty mess he is going to get into. We want to be

on the ground floor when the big news breaks."

"I don't know," she demurred. "I like newspaper work, but I hate to spy on a decent young man."

"How do we know he's decent? Why's he hiding? You don't know what he may be pulling off. And look at the chance I'm giving you."

"What chance?"

"Why, he might fall in love with you, and you could cop ninety million dollars!"

"I don't care for your comedy, Mr. Madden," said the girl so biting that

the humorist flushed, stammered and apologized.

"Just a joke," he said. "Can you take the Twentieth Century to-day?"

"I suppose so," she said slowly. "But if I do not like this assignment I shall ask to be relieved. Anyway, I'll look the ground over."

"Great! Here's an order for five hundred dollars to start with. When you need more money, wire. Good-by." He thrust out his hand.

She smiled enigmatically, but shook hands and in five minutes was out of the *Blade* office. She never returned.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Superstitions of Spanish Sailors

SPANISH sailors still cling to the same superstitions that were rife on the Santa Maria when she first poked her blunt nose into the waters of the New World.

The beating of the sheaves and pins of the blocks on certain days of the month to drive the devil out of the gear is a Spanish superstition that has flourished ever since the reign of Fernando of Aragon. It is said to have originated in an order which resulted in disaster. The commander of a Spanish squadron ordered it anchored in a certain port where there was entertainment for officers and men alike.

While they were ashore discipline relaxed on the ship and duties were neglected. The enemy in overwhelming numbers surprised the Spaniards, who were unable either to take battle formation or escape as all the blocks were rusted and useless. The entire squadron was destroyed, and since that time the beating of the blocks is a custom on every Spanish sailing ship; the noise is terrific.

A strange bird settling on the masthead at sea causes much excitement on a Spanish vessel; the feathered visitor is treated with the greatest consideration. To harm it would surely bring shipwreck and death.

The Spaniard believes devoutly in the phantom ships that are supposed to sail the seas and warn mariners of danger. Any number of sailors claim to have seen them, which is probably true, but it is hard to convince most of them that the phantom is merely the reflection of a real ship sailing perhaps fifty or one hundred miles away.

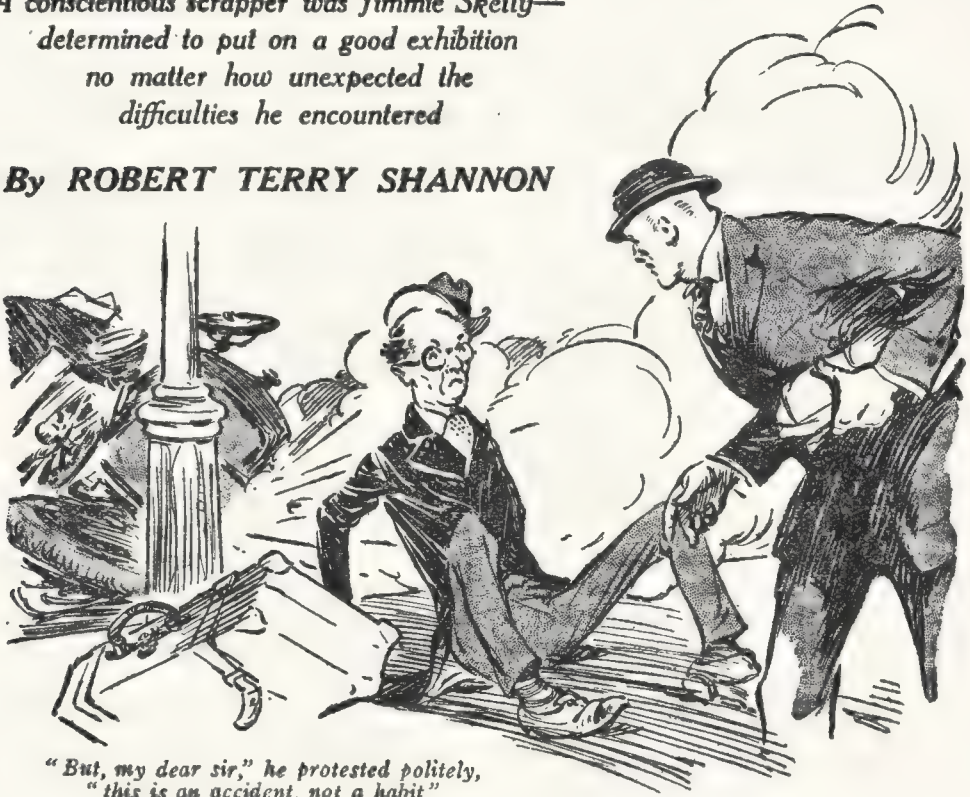
A Spanish captain will not allow a seaman to bring his duffel aboard in a blue chest; blue is the hoodoo color of the maritime world, not only in Spain, but in almost all countries.

Minna Irving.

The Temporary Highbrow

*A conscientious scrapper was Jimmie Skelly—
determined to put on a good exhibition
no matter how unexpected the
difficulties he encountered*

By ROBERT TERRY SHANNON



*"But, my dear sir," he protested politely,
"this is an accident, not a habit"*

WHEN the freight train finally came to a stop Jimmie Skelly crawled out from his precarious perch on the under rods and sniffed the alien, smoky atmosphere of the railroad yards.

Autumn dusk and chill were in the air; the hour was six o'clock. At nine o'clock Jimmie Skelly was booked to enter the ring at the auditorium of the Pioneer Sporting Club. The purse was a matter of twenty-five dollars, win, lose or draw.

There was a bit of soap in the youth's pocket, and much experience with freight car travel had taught him that there would be a huge, dripping water tank somewhere in the yards. The water, when he found it, was icy cold, but he managed to get the grime

off his face and hands, not forgetting to douse some over his bullet-shaped, rusty head.

Cleansed, he unrolled a small newspaper bundle and quickly got into a clean shirt and collar. Above a vigorous purple necktie a rugged, battered countenance grinned amiably at the twinkling lights of the city. Jimmie Skelly was still young enough to thrill with expectancy at strange, dancing lights; his eyes, blue as the sea, were glistening. With a pair of good fists a guy could scrap his way all over the whole bloomin' world!

Thirty minutes later he had found and finished with a Greek restaurant. A trifle bandy in the legs, he emerged with a slight, confident swagger; several silver coins jingled in his pocket, a

full quart of beef stew lay comforting-ly in his healthy young stomach.

An odd hunch that he might win the night's fight suffused him with a cheery sense of well being. Not that it mattered much—a preliminary boy, a ham-an'-egger, wasn't expected to have a reputation. Win, lose or draw—twenty-five bucks. Easy money! Earn while you learn—that was the ticket. Already Jimmie Skelly was picking up the fine points of boxing. A little weak, as yet, on punching, but that would develop in time. Meanwhile—

FOR one paralyzing instant Jimmie Skelly stood rooted to the curb as Fate drew back a fist to smash him into eternity. It all happened with the unexpectedness of a lightning bolt.

From a dozen throats a hoarse, warning cry filled his ears. Straight toward him, a careening automobile, wholly out of the control of the frantic figure at the wheel, sprang like a vicious animal. Steam was pouring from the radiator, rusted fenders were vibrating wickedly, an ancient engine was roaring.

At the last moment the man at the wheel gave a desperate tug. A swerve, a smash, and a crash. Decisively, against an iron lamp-post, the rampant machine smashed itself into a wreck of flying parts. The gasoline tank exploded and sent a rush of flame twenty feet in the air.

Between two ticks of time a form came rolling toward the petrified feet of Jimmie Skelly; at no great distance behind came a tumbling valise. The death blow of Fate had fallen short.

"'Tis hurting yourself you'll be some fine day wit' that kind of driving," Jimmie remarked to the disheveled figure. "It's fancy, but is it safe?"

From a sitting posture the stranger blinked behind horn-rimmed spectacles. Despite a deep tan on his face, he had a vague, unworldly look that contrasted with the evidence of an outdoor life.

"But my dear sir," he protested politely, "this is an accident, not a habit. I was never more surprised in my life."

At one time in his life Jimmie Skelly had driven a light delivery truck. "But your clutch, man, why didn't you t'row out your clutch an' t'row on your brake?"

"Something in the mechanism stuck or jammed, and I fear I became confused for the moment," the motorist explained, rising. "I can only plead inexperience with automobiles."

"You'll be pleadin' guilty in police court if you don't duck in a hurry," Jimmie Skelly announced, with an instinctive partisanship against the police. "You're gatherin' a crowd already."

"The car," said the owner with a dispirited glance at the wreck, "was worth no more than two hundred dollars at the most. I suppose it would be the wise course to abandon it and flee—"

Jimmie Skelly was conscious of a faint tingle of approbation at the man's recklessness. "You've got the right idea, mister—"

"Skelly is the name," said the auto-ist, negligently, as he picked up his valise. "There's been considerable in the papers about me. But you won't give me away, will you?"

A glow—the call of blood to blood—leaped in the veins of the youthful pugilist. "Skelly! Skelly!" he cried. "D'ye mean to say your name's Skelly?"

"Even so," responded the other. "I am Philemon Skelly, the floriculturist. I have just returned for a lecture tour after twenty-five years spent in equatorial Africa, which accounts for my unfamiliarity with automobiles."

Jimmie Skelly tore the grip from the man's hand and hurried him along by an arm.

"Don't stop to explain," he urged fervently. "My name's Skelly, too, an' one Skelly always sticks to another. You might be a cousin."

"Possibly," murmured the fugitive. "Do you think we shall be trailed?"

"Leave it to me!"

Jimmie Skelly pushed his charge into the front entrance of a corner drug store and steered him out again through a side door into the comparative quiet of a side street. A swift glance showed that, as yet, no pursuit had been organized.

"I fear I must rely entirely upon your kindness in this situation," Philemon Skelly confessed. "In the trackless wilds of the jungle I yield leadership to no man, but in this, your complex civilization, I find myself in a constant state of confusion—the noise, the bustle—" The jungle man spread out a helpless hand.

"I fear this may be serious," he added. "Before we met I swerved and knocked a policeman from a motor cycle he was riding."

Jimmie Skelly groaned. "They'll comb the town for you. D'ye have any money?"

"Oh, yes. You see, I am on a lecture tour, and I thought by purchasing an inexpensive car and driving from city to city—"

"It 'll weaken your bank roll a bit, Mr. Skelly, but there's no hidin' place like a big hotel. In wit' you!" They were abreast a towering hostelry. Like rabbits diving into a warren they disappeared through a revolving door.

"You are indeed a good Samaritan," Philemon Skelly said, gratefully.

"Nix," returned Jimmie. "I ain't a good Assyrian or any other kinda wop. I'm Irish—see—the same as you are. Anybody named Skelly is always Irish—an' we gotta stick together. C'mon now."

THE lights, the glisten of mahogany and marble, stirred a sensation of romance in the breast of young Jimmie Skelly. Five minutes before he had been on the curb, none too far from the gutter; now he was in the midst of the luxury of the finest

hotel in the city. Something heady, like wine, went to his brain. If a guy ever got to be a champ he'd always stay in the big, fine hotels. It made a guy step pretty in the ring when he knew he had a background of prosperity.

Deliberately, with a scowl, he wrote his own name on the register. His companion would need an *alias*; the name of John Smith occurred to Jimmie Skelly, and he wrote it down.

"Two beds?" the clerk asked.

A strange light beamed in Jimmie's eye. "D'ye think we're a couple o' bums?" he asked coldly. "We'll have two rooms wit' a bed in each an' a bathroom betwixt."

The clerk's eyes widened; but Jimmie Skelly fixed him with an icy eye.

"You're talkin' to the leadin' lightweight contender for the champ's crown—Jimmie Skelly. An' listen, brother, when them sportin' editors come round to interview me, send 'em right up to my suite."

Who shall estimate the force of a firm voice and an aggressive mien? Into the eyes of the clerk came a subtle deference.

"Certainly, Mr. Skelly. We're very glad, indeed, to have you and your—ah—your manager, Mr. Smith, with us."

In his own field, Philemon Skelly was not without distinction. He was, beyond question, the greatest authority on the African *genus Lilium*; a gentle scholar and scientist, he had nevertheless battled for his life, in times past, with naked knives on the dirt floor of a savage's hut.

Yet Philemon Skelly had been deceived. That a person so vaguely distinguished as his protector should condescend to carry about a newspaper bundle struck him as one of the eccentricities of greatness. True, Philemon was not clear as to the nature of the young man's greatness, but his manner with the hotel clerk had been, in a way, almost regal. Jimmie felt the other's eye upon his bundle.

"My main baggage is at the depot," he explained. "I just brought up a few things in my hand."

In the handsomely furnished suite, Jimmie Skelly sank into the depths of the biggest and softest chair he had ever occupied in his rough and tumble life. If his heart felt stifled and uncertain amid the awe-inspiring magnificence of thick carpets and heavy upholstery he masked his feelings under a finely calculated confidence.

"Make yourself easy, friend," he advised, with a hospitable wave of the hand. "All you gotta do is lay low in here two-t'ree days till your acts of violence are f'rgotten."

Philemon Skelly sighed. "But I've a lecture engagement for to-night—"

"Listen, Mr. Skelly—you can't get by wit' that rough stuff in America like maybe you can in Africa," Jimmie cut in decisively. "You committed a felony an' you'll go to jail f'r a couple o' years if you're caught. That's the way they do things in this country. One false move an' you'll be wearin' handcuffs."

Twenty-five years in the primeval wilderness had hardened the middle-aged Philemon Skelly at some points and weakened him at others. Now, as the steel jaws of civilization began to close on him like a trap, he was conscious of utter helplessness. Civilization was an intricate game, the rules of which had long ago become dim and vague in his mind.

One of his sun-browned hands fluttered in resignation; jungle-bred liberty was too precious to jeopardize.

"A fool," he said, quoting an African proverb, "disputes with his guide—and so I'll follow your advice, my friend. Your name is Skelly; likewise mine. So be it."

PHILOSOPHICALLY, the hunted man took off his light topcoat and folded it; a rolled newspaper in a side pocket caught Jimmie Skelly's eye and he reached for it.

"Here, I'll show you my credentials," he said proudly.

Finding the sport page, he ran a stubby finger down a column seeking an item that was his claim to fame. Marking the spot, he passed the paper over. Philemon Skelly read:

Battling Jimmie Skelly makes his local debut to-night in one of the six-round preliminaries. This lad, while reputed to have a glass jaw, is said to be game and fairly scientific.

Philemon Skelly put aside the paper absently; he had weightier matters on his mind: "I see," he murmured, "you are a professional wrestler."

The answering groan of the battler was drowned in the sudden, clamorous ringing of the telephone. Instantly the fear of the police sprang alive in the mind of each.

"Leave it to me—I'll stall 'em!" Jimmie urged swiftly. "Off wit' your clothes an' inter bed—it'll look innocent. Step fast!"

From the receiver came a slow, measured voice—a familiar brogue—for the accent that is born on the Emerald Isle is unlike any other speech under the sun. The tones of Erin, the stress in the throat, are forever the same.

"Is thot Misther Skelly spakin'?"

Jimmie Skelly's own voice seemed to thicken responsively. "It is thot."

"This is Michael O'Grady, Misther Skelly. Me wife sint me wit' the automobile f'r to carry ye to the auditorium t'night. The piece in the newspaper didn't say whur ye was a-stoppin'. I been searchin' all the hotels."

Sweet music, like the trilling of many songbirds, swirled in the breast of Jimmie Skelly. For the first time in his life he was encountering the fruits of popularity and publicity—the rabid hero-worshiper, the self-appointed reception committee. No longer must he listen silently while more prominent fighters talked of public adulation!

"You—you say you got your automobile wit' you?" he asked, steadying his voice with an effort.

"Aye, I hov that, Misther Skelly. Shall I wait downstairs f'r ye?"

The brightening eyes of Jimmie Skelly swept the opulence of mahogany and tapestry chairs. His throat was very dry.

"C'mon up an' wait in my quarters," he said, impulsively. "I ain't quite ready to leave yet." He hung up with a grin.

"It was only one of my admirers callin' f'r me in his limousine," he told Philemon Skelly a moment later, in the adjoining room. "You know I'm performin' to-night—an' I was wonderin' could you loan me that overcoat of yours an' your valise f'r a couple o' hours. My trunk ain't wit' me an'—"

Philemon Skelly tossed a hand toward his possessions; instinctively, he knew his young friend for an honest man.

"Certainly," he agreed. "I had intended to stay in the rooms this evening in any case."

"Atta boy!" declared Jimmie firmly. "I'll close the door between the rooms—no use takin' any chances."

Rapidly, he emptied the bag and dropped his bundle into it. Nonchalantly, he tossed the topcoat across his arm—a touch of class. Secretly, he had always dreamed of just such moments.

A timid rapping on the outside door. Hat in hand, snowy-haired and wizened, Michael O'Grady came into the suite on his aged, bandy legs.

"'Tis not me habit to force meself on big bugs like ye be, Misther Skelly," he proclaimed throatily. "It was me ould woman's idee—"

Jimmie Skelly shook the venerable hand; gazed with respectful eyes upon the clean-shaven face and shining linen of his visitor. "That's perfec'ly all right, sorr," he declared heartily. "If your ould lady wants to butt in on a

man's game what can you an' me argue wit' her about? Kid 'em along, that's my motto."

Whoever Michael O'Grady had expected to find waiting—it certainly was not such a pleasant youth with such sensible ideas.

"Yer a mon after me own heart, Misther Skelly," he returned, with the warmth of the aged toward the respectful young. "Only but f'r the ould woman I wouldn't hov the pleasure av meetin' ye, young sorr. Meself, I'm more av a mon f'r home life."

Jimmie Skelly's buoyancy became slightly loggy. He would have preferred a more enthusiastic worshiper.

"Well, the ladies are gettin' to be the worst bugs of all these days," he admitted. "It's my opinion they'll kill the game—but what can we do? They swell the gate receipts—but it's a bad business. An' shall we be steppin' along now, sorr?"

Michael O'Grady's dim eyes wandered to the handbag at Jimmy Skelly's feet. "Be ye not comin' back to the hotel, Misther Skelly?" he inquired.

Jimmie smiled tolerantly. "It's my costume in there." A guy had to be patient and polite with old people.

"Ye don't appear in the same clothes ye be wearin' now? Ye see, I ain't well informed on this *culture* business the ould woman's always talkin' about."

That explained everything. The man's wife was a bug on this here physical culture gag and was trying to get the old coot interested.

"The ould woman," Michael O'Grady pronounced, "is daffy on the subject av science."

Jimmie smiled modestly, as he opened the door and switched off the lights. "Well, science is my specialty," he admitted. "Science an' footwork."

THE waiting car proved, indeed, to be a limousine. In the matter of transportation, at least, Jimmie Skelly's fondest dream was beautifully realized. A swift, smooth ride through

a strange city—a uniformed chauffeur—the glistening car sliding to a suave stop before a white stone building which had, somehow, the look of a theater. Michael O'Grady stirred himself out of a senile silence that had enveloped him during the ride.

"Here we be at the Athenæum, Misther Skelly."

A soft whistle from Jimmie's lips. "Some auditorium—one swell dump!" he conceded. The last auditorium in which he fought had been an abandoned street car barn.

Michael O'Grady was creaking to the sidewalk. "D'ye want to go in by the front door, lad, an' shake hands wit' the crowd, or would ye prefer to slip in by the side entrance?" he queried.

The side door was O. K. with Jimmie Skelly. The proper, champion-like thing was to duck the crowd.

"Much obliged f'r the ride." Jimmie stuck out a farewell hand, but Michael O'Grady waved it aside.

"I'll stick wit' ye, lad—the ould woman'd raise hell av I left you go loose. Ye follow me."

Together they found their way into a strangely empty back stage interior. Several vacant dressing rooms seemed available, and, with a growing confidence, Jimmie Skelly picked the best one.

A subtle strangeness pervaded this, the nether region of fistiana. The usual bustle and noise connected with a fight arena were utterly absent; the quietude, oddly, reminded Jimmie Skelly of a church. Still, it was early yet—the ring itself had not even been set up on the stage, or the asbestos curtain lifted.

In the curtained-off front part of the house there were sounds indicating the arrival and the seating of spectators. Seats were being slapped down by ushers, but it was evidently a dignified audience—no whistling, no jovial, disorderly shouting back and forth.

Later on there would, of course, be plenty of activity. The cavernous

region back stage would be populated with fighters, managers and seconds. When bouts were held in an opera house it was always clubby and sociable—a bit profane, perhaps, and highly odorous of liniment, but friendly. A hard-boiled promoter would stroll back to see that all of his performers had arrived, that everything was all jake. There'd be an electric verve in the whole atmosphere. But it was still early.

"How'd you like to come in my dressin' room w'ile I put on my workin' clothes, sorr?"

Jimmie smiled mendaciously. By a bit of headwork it might be possible to turn the old bird's evident prosperity to good account. Prize fight promoters were saps, like anybody else. If a boy could impress them with the idea that he had friends—influential followers—it was a cinch to get plenty of bookings.

That's all the promoters cared about—the gate receipts. They'd put on a one-legged fighter if he had a good following. And Michael O'Grady was a bit of human scenery that looked like ready money. Properly managed, a return engagement ought to be a cinch.

"Come in an' sit wit' me w'ile I get dressed," Jimmie urged again.

MICHAEL O'GRADY, with an air of slight bewilderment, entered the narrow dressing room and lowered himself into a chair. With his head tilted to one side he watched the youth disrobe and get into the green fighting trunks, the colorful emblem of his racial descent.

A pair of soft leather boxing shoes came next, with socks neatly rolled down to the top of the shoes. On a row of wall hooks the none too elegant street clothes of Jimmie Skelly were carefully arranged. Clad for the ring the boy was a striking figure, so far as his fighter's build was concerned. About chest and arms pliant muscles undulated under smooth skin; deep of chest and flat of stomach Jimmie Skelly

looked fit to meet the champion. Michael O'Grady, with puzzled eyes, glanced at his watch.

"Won't ye be after catchin' cold, Misther Skelly?"

Jimmie carelessly threw Philemon's topcoat over his shoulders. "I hate to wait," he remarked idly. "As soon as I'm ready I'm always r'arin' to go."

"Well, in thot case ye better get ready f'r yer appearance."

"I'm all set," Jimmie said. "They can call me when they're ready."

The O'Grady eyes flared a trifle. "Ready!" It was almost a snort. "Ready! Ye don't call thot ready?"

"Surest thing you know," Jimmie nodded. "I don't need any rub-down before I step out. I can limber up in ten seconds."

The older man's eyes grew blank and he rubbed his chin with uncertain fingers. "Yer a remarkable mon, Misther Skelly," he mumbled.

"Wait—you ain't seen nothin' yet," Jimmie smiled, half bantering.

Uncertainty resolved into positive distress on Michael O'Grady's face. It was true that he had never before attended any of the university extension lectures in which his ambitious wife had so recently shown an active interest, but he had assumed that they were, at least, as formal and conventional as a political meeting, for instance. And never had he seen a politician—even the rowdiest—as scantily garbed as the young lecturer before him. It was scarcely a sight to be credited.

"Ye'll excuse me ignorance, Misther Skelly, but—don't ye wear anything around—around yer body?"

The poor old coot—asking a dumb question like that! "I'll wear this coat till I'm called an' then I'll t'row it aside," Jimmie explained, with a shade of weariness.

Michael O'Grady hesitated; cleared his throat. "Ye'll be after surprisin' 'em, Misther Skelly. I know thot—ye'll shock 'em!"

"I hope I knock 'em cold," Jimmie declared earnestly. "I'd like to establish a reputation in this town."

The ancient head wagged sadly. Indeed, the lad was on the verge of establishing a reputation. Unused as he was to the customs and practices of the higher educational circles, Michael O'Grady was certain that his wife, for one, would be knocked cold by the strange costuming of this young lecturer. Mrs. O'Grady, he remembered, had ever been the soul and the champion of modesty.

Again Michael O'Grady cleared his throat diplomatically.

"I don't believe," he said cautiously, "thot I'd appear out there wit'out a few more clothes on, Misther Skelly. It might be took amiss by some in the audience. In thim college towns wit' their capers it might be all right, but the people in this town be more settled in their ways."

JIMMIE had to turn away to hide his smile. The old duck was a scream! It sure took all kinds of people to make a world. But a guy had to be patient with the kind-hearted old duffer.

"D'ye go to prize fights often, sorr?"

"I do not—I nivr did. But speakin' about puttin' on some more clothes, Misther Skelly—"

"Now, now," Jimmie soothed him, "I always step out like this. It's customary—everybody does."

"Wit' nothin' else on?"

"Wit' gloves on, of course."

"Gloves—*gloves!*" Michael O'Grady paled about the lips. "Little good gloves'll do ye! But f'r yer health's sake—the house ain't so well heated, mon—ye'll catch a cold—"

"I never caught a cold in my life. I always work up a good sweat right away."

"But ye should consider the other folks in the house—the ladies—Misther Skelly."

"Don't worry about the ladies, sorr. They don't mind—"

"At least ye ought to put on a pair av pants!" Michael O'Grady insisted.

"Pants," explained the harassed young boxer, "would only get in my way an' hinder me."

It was time, he decided, to stop such nonsensical quibbling. With old people it was necessary sometimes to take a firm stand.

"Not meanin' any disrespect, sorr," he added sharply, "but will you quit worryin' about my clothes? I tell you I've always dressed like this—I've done it dozens of times."

"Before women, Misther Skelly?"

"An' children an' dogs an' cats, sorr. It's my bread an' butter an' it's done this way all over the United States!"

An ancient fire began to glow, faintly, in the eyes of Michael O'Grady.

"Misther Skelly," he said, "me wife is prisint—an' it ain't dacent!"

Jimmie Skelly got to his feet frowning. He was, he felt, about to utter a great truth in behalf of a great and time-honored sport, in behalf of countless honest men who earned their daily bread with their padded fists.

"If you will pardon me, sorr, I'll beg leave to contradick that statement. There's not a cleaner sport in the world—an' if the ladies don't like the way us guys dress let 'em stay home!"

Around the top of his gold-headed cane the fingers of Michael O'Grady were beginning to twine nervously. A shrewd suspicion gathered in his old eyes, as a terrible thought began to take definite form. Before now, he had heard of the direful effect of too much study and brainwork. And the tropic sun—the man was from Africa, wasn't he? A young man, more the pity, and a rugged one. A number of reasons might account for the sudden toppling of a once splendid mind—an accident—a fall.

"Hov ye iver been sthruck on the head, Misther Skelly? A blow that jarred yer—yer brain, now?"

"Hundreds of times I been hit on the head," Jimmie told him shortly. "I ain't ashamed of it—why should I be?"

Slowly, the old man nodded; about his mouth crept the expression, peculiarly, of a fox; his white shaggy brows contracted shrewdly. Doubt no longer existed; at any moment the pitiful wreck of a damaged, but noble mind might become dangerous.

"In that case," said Michael O'Grady, rising, "I'll hov to consult me wife!"

Before Jimmie could comprehend what was in the other's mind, his questioner, with remarkable speed for one of his years, leaped from the room, slammed the door and turned an outside key which, unfortunately, was in the lock.

BEYOND the door was silence, except for the slight sound of Michael O'Grady's retreating footsteps. A dread suspicion that had been revolving in Jimmie Skelly's mind became a chilling conviction.

"The poor old coot," he muttered. "Went clean batty—right before my very eyes!"

Unaided, escape from the room was impossible. The door was tightly locked—Jimmie gave it the once over—not a chance to burst through its metal fireproof construction. And no window whatever. A momentary panic, a caged-in desperation, gave way immediately to the comforting realization that, in a few minutes, there would be plenty of people outside—fighters and handlers—to unlock the door. The waiting time was almost negligible. Almost at once there was a discreet tapping on the metal panel.

"Are ye all right, Misther Skelly?" It was the voice of Michael O'Grady, cautious and soothing.

"You betcher right eye I'm all right!" Jimmie yelled. "You open that door an' lemme out'n here, y' poor nut!"

The lock of the door grated—the barrier moved on its hinges. Beside Michael O'Grady was a tall stalwart man, a man hard of face and cold of eye.

"Misther Skelly, I want ye to meet me son Dennis," said Michael O'Grady softly. "Dennis'll take the bist av care av ye, poor lad. He'll see that ye get home safe, an'—"

Dennis O'Grady stepped into the room. For a silent instant his motionless eyes bored into Jimmie Skelly's. Then, with one hand, he flipped back the lapel of his coat. On the under side Jimmie Skelly saw a badge—the badge of a cop.

"Beat it, pop!" A backward jerk of the newcomer's thumb motioned Michael O'Grady to depart.

"Ye'll be gentle wit' him, Dennis—"

"Beat it, pop. Leave him to me."

"But I brought him here, Dennis. He looked all right, at first."

A chill note, the professional coldness of the born policeman, was in Dennis O'Grady's voice. "I get you—he's gone nutty. An' so's my whole damn family f'r gettin' mixed up in this mess. Now on your way, pop, an' let me handle this—in my own way."

"Am I pinched?" asked Jimmie Skelly when they were alone.

The big man laughed. "D'ye think you deserved to be pinched, kid?" he asked.

"Chief, I—"

The other's smile soured suddenly. "Nix on that chief stuff—you know I ain't the big works, so you ain't kiddin' nobody but yourself. Come clean an' don't try to get fresh."

Deep in his heart, Jimmie Skelly had an unpleasant feeling that he was guilty—although he was vague as to the exact nature of the crime. All of his mental energy had shifted from the supposed aberration of Michael O'Grady to his own unpleasant predicament. Some fragment of conscience warned him that it might be best to

tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

"Chief," he began.

The smack of a hand sounded explosively in the small room. Across Jimmie Skelly's face were the livid marks of four fingers. The rest of his face, all at once, went dead white.

"Didn't I tell you not to get fresh and pull that *Chief* bunk on me?" demanded the police officer arrogantly. "Now come clean or I'll slap your face loose from your neck!"

All power to think had departed from Jimmie Skelly, but he did manage to come clean, at last. He came clean with his right and his left and from the depths of his simple fighting heart.

Smack! Smack! Right—left—left and right.

The hulking form twisted and dropped—did not move.

"Ye big stiff!" breathed Jimmie Skelly, his chest rising and falling rapidly. "Ye scum—ye gutter pup son av a dacent father! Slap me face, will ye—f'r nothin'?"

Being thoroughly knocked out, Dennis O'Grady did not hear.

In an emergency Jimmie Skelly found that he could make haste to a purpose. From the wall hooks his clothes were snatched; with topcoat, bag and loose garments flopping he reached an outside door—dodged out and into an alley.

Philemon Skelly was sound asleep when Jimmie Skelly regained the hotel. No good to awaken him—a note left under the door would explain that.

I got to blow. Am in jam with bulls.
Hire a good lawyer for yourself and
don't worry on my acct.

Your pal, J. S.
P. S. Copped my man in the first
round.

The first knockout—and outweighed, too, by fifty pounds or more.

It made a guy feel great, pepped him up, even if he was leaving town dead broke—and on the brake rods.

THE END



She seemed to sense the leering gaze bent upon her

Wolves of the Ranch

The ranch or his girl? Ted Trevor didn't want to lose either—but keeping them both meant plenty of adroit maneuvering

By C. C. WADDELL

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SPRING floods wash out a Montana bridge and with it ten carloads of cattle belonging to jolly, optimistic, easy-going Henry "Pop" Trevor. Pop, expanding his one hundred thousand-acre Plateau Ranch, has had to borrow heavily, and Banker Pohlman gives him thirty days to pay his blanket mortgage—or lose the ranch. Pop does not know that his jealous brother, Gilbert, is interested in the mortgage and is trying to grab Plateau Ranch.

Pop's son, Ted, has just written that he is engaged to an actress, Phyllis Duhamel. Pop sends for Ted, telling of the impending loss. Ted writes Phyllis, breaking the engagement, and drives home with two classmates, Jim

Barnes, engineer, and Herb Crawford, math shark and amateur efficiency expert, who loyally volunteered to do what they could to stave off disaster.

Pop welcomes them, highly skeptical of their ability to help, though Mom is awed when Herb converts Wong Fen, the cook, to his efficiency plans—by quoting Confucius—and the cowhands accept Herb as a regular waddy when he proves his ability in the branding pen. Jim goes riding on a private exploring tour, and Ted, discouraged, returns to the house. He is doubly disheartened at not hearing from Phyllis, and is almost inclined to believe his father's judgment of her is better than his own.

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Just then Kwen Lee, the house-boy, tells Ted that a lady is downstairs, asking for him.

CHAPTER IV.

EFFICIENCY'S VERDICT.

FROM the head of the stairs, Ted saw Phyllis standing in the doorway, and he took the flight down to her in a single bound.

But just as he was about to clasp her in his arms, a group of other people who were with her crowded in about them, and made it a very noisy, general greeting instead of the rapturous embrace for which he was headed.

Ted recognized this gang as members of Phyllis's theatrical troupe, among them "Dad" and Mrs. Wilson, a couple of oldtimers full of memories of Maurice Barrymore and Nat Goodwin; and with them, less to Ted's satisfaction, the young treasurer of the company, Arthur Blake, of whom Ted was more or less jealous.

In fact, he would willingly have murdered the whole bunch for spoiling his meeting with Phyllis; but he managed in a measure to dissemble his feelings and give them a proper welcome.

Explanations followed in an eager chorus. The company had been compelled to close, it seemed, owing to the high waters, for the devastation in the territory through which they were booked was much greater even than about Laidlaw.

At the town where they were to have opened the night before, they had found the theater awash, and no way of getting inside but by rowboat.

Under the circumstances, especially as reports from the route ahead showed conditions as bad or worse, there seemed nothing to do but abandon the tour, and Blake and Phyllis, with Mr. and Mrs. Wilson and Rose Regley, the ingénue, had started for Phyllis's home at Minneapolis in the manager's big touring car.

But washouts and missing bridges on the International Highway had thrown them far out of their way; and now, after a series of roundabout detours, they found themselves landed at Laidlaw for the night. And naturally, being so close, they had run over to the ranch.

While they were talking, Ted had observed that his ring still gleamed on Phyllis's finger; and now a sudden thought struck him.

"Did you get my letter?" he asked her in a murmured aside.

"Your letter?" she repeated with a laugh. "If you sent it to that next town, I certainly did not. The water was rising, and we didn't stop for mail, or anything else. We just beat it as fast as we could for fear we might be cut off and marooned there."

"But how then did you know I was at the ranch?"

"Why, you had told me you were coming home for your vacation." She glanced at him with a touch of surprise. "Where else would you be?"

THERE was no opportunity to say more; for by this time Pop and Mom Trevor had come out on the veranda, and a buzz of introductions ensued. Naturally, too, those two hospitable souls would not hear of any of the party returning to the hotel at Laidlaw, but insisted they must stay at the ranch.

So here was poor Ted with a fiancée on his hands from whom he had broken, but who evidently believed herself engaged hard and fast. He had all his explaining still to do, and the situation made it extremely awkward to do so.

But why explain, came the temptation to him. Why not let the engagement stand? Perhaps it was an intervention of Fate that she should have missed his letter!

The rain had passed since he had come into the house, the lowering clouds had all dispersed; and now the golden glow of the setting sun was ly-

ing soft and warm over the broad acres of his heritage, giving a promise of fair weather ahead.

Might this not be an omen, he asked himself? He wanted Phyllis. He had not known how much he wanted her, how much she was to him until he had thought she was lost to him. Surely, it was not meant that they should part. Something was bound to turn up to prevent it, just as the floods had prevented her from receiving that mistaken letter of his, and had brought her to him.

The gloomy doubts that had assailed him, the conviction that everything was gone to the demnition bow-wows, passed like the clouds of the afternoon. He felt a buoyant sense of assurance. The ranch and his romance were both going to be saved. Something would turn up.

He caught himself up with an ironic twist of the lips. He was dropping right into Pop's easy philosophy! Well, at that, Pop hadn't done so badly with it. Even though his present difficulties were to swamp him, it was, nevertheless, his optimism that had made Plateau Ranch.

Ted's reverie was broken by a touch upon the arm. He turned to find his father standing behind him. The visitors had gone to their rooms to freshen up after their day's ride over the muddy, washed-out roads, and the old man seeing Ted standing alone on the veranda, had come out to join him.

"Did you tell me that you had broken your engagement to that girl?" Pop asked sharply.

"Well, I thought I had, but the letter in which I told her of our troubles was never received. Now, I suppose, I'll have to break the engagement all over again."

"If you do, I'll break your neck!" The old man gave him a look of ferocious disgust. "If I was your age, and had a girl like that promised to me, I'd never let her go, not if hell froze over. I'd back up against the wall, and fight the devil himself to hold her.

Good gosh! Haven't you got any guts?"

"But you told me yourself that it would never do," argued Ted, seeking to fortify his own inclination. "You said we lived in different worlds, and—"

"What if I did?" exploded Pop. "I was a derved old fool. Besides, I hadn't seen her then. But you had; and how in tunket you ever made up your mind to let her go, after once getting your brand on her, beats me. Why, that girl's one in a million, you poor sap. And if I hear any more talk about giving her up, I'll—I'll disown you.

"Let me tell you somethin' else." He wagged a threatening forefinger. "You want to ride herd pretty close on that little trick, or else you'll wake up some morning, and find she's gone. I saw that Whoozis what owns the car looking at her—her treasurer, you said he was; and, believe me, he'd rustle her off'n you in a minute if he got a chance. If that happened, you'd be the first Trevor that ever let another feller get his gal away from him. Ask Mom; she knows."

THE troubled voice of the mistress of the ranch broke in upon them at that moment.

"Why, Henry! You're getting yourself all heated up!" she exclaimed. "The way you're stamping your foot and gritting your teeth, you'll work yourself into a fever. What on earth is the matter?"

"Matter enough!" snarled Pop. "This nincompoop here is talking about breaking with that lovely girl, simply because we happen to be up against it for the moment. Why, something may turn up to-morrow or next day—any old time—to put us right back on the crest of the wave."

Mom glanced from her husband to her son, and a little intuitive smile passed across her lips.

"I guess there's no great need to worry, Henry," she said quietly.

"Phyllis, as you say, is a darling—just the girl I would choose for a daughter; and unless I am greatly mistaken, she will be just that. Teddy, as he is so fond of telling us, knows his artichokes.

"But right now we are facing a real calamity." Her placid voice became agitated. "I went down to tell Wong Fen that we would have five extra to supper, and all I can get out of him is: 'No can do.' He says that Mr. Crawford gave him a daily schedule of expense, and that he won't exceed it.

"I don't know what we can do about it, unless we give our supper to the guests, and the rest of us take bread and milk, or go without. There's no use trying to argue with Wong Fen."

Ted saw a glum frown gathering on his father's brow, and spoke up hastily. It would never do to let pop get out of patience with Efficiency Herb at this stage of the game.

"I'll tell you!" He seized upon a happy thought. "Shoot some Confucius at him."

"But I don't know any Confucius," wailed the poor lady.

"Shucks! What difference does that make?" cavilled Ted. "Frame up something that sounds like it. Say: 'Is is not written, that circumstances alter cases?' or 'The gold of hospitality outshines the lead of expense schedules.' Here, let me do it." He started for the kitchen. "I'll fix the slant-eyed palookah."

And whether it was owing to his skill at paraphrasing the Chinese seer, or to the cash gratuity with which he accompanied his exhortations, certain it is that Wong Fen experienced a change of heart, and that the supper, when served, was up to the customary profuse standard of Plateau Ranch.

HERB did not appear on the scene until just as the gong was sounding, and came to the table still in his riding togs. If he noticed any deviation from the schedule he had set,

he did not mention it. Wolfish from fresh air and exercise, he put away about twice the amount of food he had allotted as a proper ration per person.

He seemed absorbed as he ate, and after supper did not join the rest of the company in the big living room of the ranch with its moose heads on the walls and its bearskin rugs on the floor. He made the excuse that he had some figuring to do, and went up to his room.

Jim Barnes also came in late, and with his appetite in good working order. He was drenched and muddy, but he evaded all Ted's questions as to where he had been or with what purpose, contenting himself with the explanation that he had merely been looking around.

After supper, he settled down with Rose Regley, Arthur Blake, and Mrs. Wilson to a game of bridge, while "Dad" Wilson entertained Mr. and Mrs. Trevor with countless anecdotes of his experiences as a trouper.

Left to their own devices, Ted and Phyllis wandered out for a stroll in the long Northwestern twilight. They roamed on and on, and presently as they stood with arms around one another, the moon came up, shedding a flood of silver over the vast expanse of the ranch, and glinting from the snow-capped peaks of the far-away mountains.

"Oh, how beautiful," murmured Phyllis, nestling closer to him. "And how gloriously care-free your existence is here. You live like the old patriarchs in a world of your own, with no need to consult anybody outside. To think that some day this will all be ours, our home. Oh, I love it already! I am sure I shall be perfectly happy here."

How, in the face of that, could he crush her enthusiasm by telling her that he and his people held possession only by a hair, and the odds were that within thirty days the place would be in other hands?

No, he swore fiercely to himself;

there was no necessity to tell her anything of the sort. For, by Godfrey, he wasn't going to let this patrimony she so admired slip from his hands. He'd find some way to save it. As the old man had said, had he no guts?

So, instead of revealing that life at the ranch at present was anything but the care-free existence her fancy painted, he simply kissed her, and they drifted away from the subject into one of those interminable lover talks which have no interest for anybody but the persons concerned.

Presently, though, as they made their way back home, she touched again upon delicate ground and gave him something of a shock.

"Oh, by the way," she said, "I got a cable from dad after you left me that night in Seattle. He is in London, but said he was sailing for home at once, and wanted me to arrange to meet him at Laidlaw, as he was coming out there within a few days after landing.

"Of course," she went on, "closing my tour has thrown that all out; and now I will meet him at home in Minneapolis. But meanwhile I'll be getting my trousseau together, and when he starts for Laidlaw, I'll come with him, and we'll have the wedding here at the ranch. What do you think of that?"

WHAT he thought, if he had told her, would probably have startled her. Making a rapid calculation, he figured that the date for Mr. Duhamel's arrival at Laidlaw would probably hit just about the expiration of the thirty days of grace allowed his father to clear up their indebtedness.

He had a swift mental picture of Phyllis and her father appearing with trunks full of bridal clothes at the ranch gates just as the Trevor family was being dumped off the premises.

But the suggestion, instead of unnerving him, only stiffened up his backbone. More imperative than ever was it, that he should speedily win the con-

test on which he was engaged; and the very desperation of the case roused all his fighting blood. By heck, he couldn't fail!

"That 'll be great," he told Phyllis with all requisite enthusiasm, and kissed her warmly.

The bridge game was just breaking up as they entered the house, for the travelers were worn out, and ready to retire early. So it was only a few minutes later that good nights were said, and Phyllis and the others of the motor party went to their rooms.

Ted seized Jim Barnes by the arm, and hissing in his ear, "We've got to have a consultation," hustled him off to their joint quarters, where they found Herb in shirt sleeves and with disheveled hair, surrounded by page after page of closely scribbled figures.

In a few words, Ted outlined the exigency that existed, and then turned eagerly to his spectacled comrade.

"I've always had a lot of confidence in you, Herb," he said. "And this is one time where you simply have got to come through. Here, you have been figuring all evening. Surely, you must have hit upon some 'out' to the mess by this time?"

But Herb slowly shook his head.

"No," he said gloomily; "and what's more, I'm afraid there isn't any such thing as an 'out.' Of course, I can see lots of places where expenses can be cut and economies introduced, but, figure as I will, I can't make out that these will greatly help the general situation.

"The truth is—" He hesitated a moment. "Well, if you must have it, the ranch is not to-day a paying proposition."

"You're crazy!" gasped Ted.

"No; that's the cold fact. Your father might raise another loan, and keep running for awhile; but it would only be staving off the inevitable crash. At the present price of cattle and his other products, with his long haul to the railroad and the poor roads he has

to use, and with the mountain of debt he is carrying—I haven't the exact figures, but I can guess at them pretty closely—he is losing money every day.

"I hate to say it, Ted." He laid his hand sympathetically on his friend's knee. "But you are on a dead card. Plateau Ranch is a bust!"

CHAPTER V.

WHO SPILLED THE BEANS?

TED didn't sleep so well that night. It was as though he had been working to resuscitate a person in a swoon, only to awaken suddenly to a realization that he had been wasting his efforts on a corpse.

The fact staggered him. He was passionately eager to refute it. Yet an underlying strain of hard-boiled common sense in him convinced him that Herb's diagnosis of the situation was correct. Plateau Ranch, as the latter tersely put it, was a bust.

An estate which by careful handling and economical management could have been made profitable, had through Pop's happy-go-lucky methods and stubborn optimism been run against a stone wall and its neck broken.

Too late now for an efficiency doctor. Too late for the pulmotor of refinancing. The property would be taken over by the mortgagees, cut up into small farms, and sold off parcel by parcel to thrifty immigrants. At any rate, the Trevors were out of it. No comeback for them.

And a sweet pass he'd got himself into, he reflected as he tossed restlessly on his pillow, by his mad gambling on Pop's slogan of something turning up.

He'd had the chance to acquaint Phyllis with the truth, and had deliberately side-stepped it, had practically made a fool out of her.

How could he ever square himself with her? Answer was, he couldn't.

If he had met her with a recital of

the family misfortunes, and had made a clean breast of everything as he did in the letter which failed to reach her, she would undoubtedly have sympathized with him. She probably would have insisted on waiting for him until he could make a fresh start.

But to have tricked her, to have cajoled her with false pretenses, that was something no woman would forgive. She would put him down as either a coward or a four-flusher, and despise him accordingly.

It would do no good, either, to try and explain the mental reactions which had led him into his mistaken course. Put into words, his impulses sounded like those of a crack-brained visionary. And Phyllis was an exceptionally well-balanced and clear-headed girl. No matter how much she might love him, she would never intrust her future into the hands of a nut.

His engagement evidently was as much of a bust, and as bankrupt of hope as the ranch.

Question was, then, what to do about it? Phyllis would have to learn the truth, of course. But when and how?

And again he wrestled with temptation. Since, beyond peradventure, he had lost her, why make the final scene of their romance one which he would always carry as a bitter and humiliating memory?

She and her party were leaving in the morning to continue their eastward journey. For the brief hour or two that he and she would still have together, why bring up this devastating subject? Why spoil her delight in her visit to the ranch, and overshadow the rest of her trip with gloom and heart-ache?

Was it not better to let things stand as they were for the short period of her stay, send her on her way undisillusioned; and then, after her departure, write her another letter setting forth the facts, and mail it so as to reach her on her arrival at Minneapolis?

In this way, too, he could represent

that the catastrophe was a sudden affair, of which he had only gained knowledge after her stop at the ranch, and thus absolve himself from any charge of shuffling or deception.

BUT to Ted's credit, he fought down these specious and appealing arguments. He had the natural masculine shrinking from making explanations, or participating in a "scene," and the natural human inclination to take the easiest way. But he felt that it would not be fair to Phyllis; she had a right to know the facts now. In his previous prevarication to her, he in a way had been self-deceived; but he'd be hanged, he told himself, if he was going to lie to her in cold blood. He'd shoot square.

Having reached this decision, he finally, as the gray dawn stole in at the window, dropped off into a troubled sleep; and as a result of his exhausting vigil did not wake until late.

In fact, when he noted the time, he had a sneaking half hope that Phyllis and her party might already have set off, and thus have relieved him of his dilemma; and it must be confessed that he rather dawdled over his dressing.

But when he had put in all the time possible, and at last crept out to the stairs, he found that this craven assumption was without basis. Her voice, fresh and clear, in conversation with his father and mother, came up to him from the veranda. As he afterward learned, Blake's car had suffered a bent axle and some other damages on the rough roads of the day before, which had put it into the ranch repair shop, and delayed any thought of a start until afternoon.

Hearing the voices, Ted paused at the head of the stairs, and stopped to listen.

Phyllis, he gathered, had been on a tour of inspection with his mother to view the various household activities of the ranch—the separation of cream and the making of butter; the poultry

yards with their broods of fluffy chicks and young turkeys, the duck ponds, the pig pens; the great storerooms for meat and provisions; the rows upon rows of preserves in bottles and cans, wild cranberries, raspberries and saskatoons brought in by the Indians, together with apples, pears, and plums, tomatoes, pumpkins, and decoctions of watermelon rind.

The girl was twittering excitedly over her novel experiences.

"Oh, I think it is heavenly here!" she exclaimed. "A perfect paradise. Could you imagine anything lovelier than that outlook off across the slopes, with the mountains in the background?"

"It will be still lovelier in a few weeks," said Mom. "You will see it when you come back."

"Henry," she turned to her husband, "did you know that our new daughter is coming back to us in a short time, and to stay? She and Ted have arranged to have the wedding here at the ranch within a month."

"Great!" applauded Pop vociferously. He was evidently in his most expansive and optimistic mood. No possibility of a cloud upon his sunlit horizons.

"We'll make it an old-fashioned celebration," he said. "Put everything on the place in its best bib and tucker, and hold open house for the whole county. And since this is to be your home, my dear, I want you to tell us now any changes you want made, or anything that will add to your comfort or enjoyment, so that we can have it ready for you when you come."

Ted gave a gasp, and involuntarily sat down hard on the stairs.

COULD anything be more like Pop than this free-handed, darn-the-expense style of speech? Cost never entered into his calculations. He always talked in such a way as to give the impression that he had millions back of him.

But he had certainly put a crimp in Ted's virtuous resolutions by his loose promises and careless air of wealth.

How was it possible now to go to Phyllis and disclose that they were on the brink of ruin, without making Pop a fraudulent old blowhard, and the whole family just a bunch of bluffing impostors?

He was willing to let her think badly of him. But he wasn't going to brand his father as a liar, too. That was asking too much.

Under the circumstances, there seemed nothing to do but fall back on the expedient which he had considered before—to act as if everything were rosy until he got her safely away from the ranch, and then write her a letter representing that an unforeseen avalanche of adversity had descended upon the Trevor family.

And, with that settled, his spirits perversely rose. He was out of an unpleasant ordeal, and yet in a way that he could not take himself to task for it. He had not purposely shirked confession, he had been willing to take his medicine. But since the dice had fallen as they had, he would not have been human if he had not felt a sense of relieve.

"*Carpe diem!*" he repeated the old Latin wisecrack softly to himself. "Seize the day!"

That was just what he would do. He'd had enough of brooding and gloom and worry. What matter if disaster and shipwreck loomed ahead of him? He had these two or three golden hours in his hands, free from care, and with the loveliest and most inspiring companion in the world. By the nine gods, he was going to make the most of every second of them!

Accordingly, he ran gayly down the stairs, and, greeting Phyllis rapturously, swept her into the breakfast room to sit with him while he fortified himself with bacon and eggs, three great stacks of griddle cakes and two cups of coffee.

5 A

"My goodness! It's lucky you live at Phateau Ranch," laughed Phyllis. "That appetite of yours would swamp any lesser place."

When he had finished, he proposed a stroll, and they started off together. But they had not proceeded far before they were joined by Efficiency Herb; and this did not suit Ted at all. To-day was one time when he did not propose to share Phyllis with anybody; he wanted her all to himself.

But in spite of obvious hints, Herb—always rather dense except where figures were concerned—seemed unable to get it through his head that two was company and three a crowd, and he stubbornly hung on.

Then, to make matters worse, they ran into a group composed of Jim Barnes, Rose Regley, Mrs. Wilson and Arthur Blake out practicing mashie shots on a section of the tableland reserved as a pasture for the dairy cattle belonging to the house.

"O H, what a glorious place for a golf course!" exclaimed Phyllis. "Do you suppose we could have one here?" she turned impulsively to Ted.

He hesitated a second; then he happened to notice Arthur Blake's glance bent on him, a bit sarcastically, as it seemed; and his resolution hardened.

In for a penny, in for a pound. Since he was posing as a young millionaire, why not do it to the limit? And it cost nothing to promise her.

"Behold the slave of the lamp!" He spread out his hands in a salaam. "Didn't the old man tell you to order anything you wanted, and we'd see that it was done?"

The suggestion struck him, too, that there was a chance to kill two birds with one stone, and get rid of the incubus who had been dogging their footsteps.

"Suppose you get busy, Herb," he directed, "and start figuring right away on an eighteen-hole golf course."

"Then Jim can lay it out, and we'll set the men to work on it to-morrow."

Both of his comrades looked rather aghast at this bold order.

"But—but that will cost money," stammered Herb. "Twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars."

"Naturally," returned Ted coolly. "I didn't think it could be done for nothing."

He silenced any further comments with a look; and Herb, swallowing his astonishment, gulped a bewildered, "All right," and headed off for the house.

Ted was about to propose to Phyllis that they leave the others to their practice, and walk on; but just then Rose Regley, a vivacious, little brunette, threw down her golf stick with the declaration that it was too hot to keep at that work.

"My make-up is all melted now into a sort of futuristic sunset." She mopped her brow with her handkerchief. "Gee! I wish there was some place we could go swimming."

"Second the motion," chimed in Phyllis eagerly. "Ted you seem able to manage everything. Can't you arrange some way to give us a swim?"

"Well," he said a little reluctantly, "I can guide you to my old swimming hole over in the ravine. There's a sort of natural pool there with a nice bit of beach, and a warm spring that so tempers the water that you can go in bathing all winter long."

"Lead us to it!" the crowd chorused as one person, and, gathering up their golf sticks, they trooped back to the house to rummage in their bags for bathing suits, and get into them.

IT was an enchanting spectacle of feminine pulchritude that Ted loaded up into the station wagon and drove over to the ravine. Phyllis, slim and boyish in a close-fitting suit of black and gold that revealed her white, flashing neck and limbs, and every line of her exquisite figure. Rose Regley, a

pocket Venus in vivid scarlet. Even Mrs. Wilson, with her well-preserved, if more mature charms, was worth looking at in her suit of blue and white stripes.

The swimming hole proved to be all that Ted had promised them, and for half an hour or more the party disported themselves like naiads.

There was, as he had told them, a good stretch of beach, and also a bench of rock rising in a series of easy terraces, which made an almost ideal diving place.

Having taken a plunge from the top-most terrace of this, Ted was swimming on his back when he happened to look up and noticed a peculiar movement among the bushes along the edge of the ravine, that excited his curiosity.

Without saying anything to the others, he left the pool, and, climbing up the bank, circled around to the spot where he had marked the phenomenon.

As he tiptoed noiselessly closer, he heard a low chuckle, and a rasping voice in muttered soliloquy:

"Best show I've seen since that feller paid my way into the theayter at St. Paul to Billy Watson's Beef Trust. Only, them gals had on tights, and these here hussies ain't wearing scarcely nothing. That's the way with all them stage wimmen, bold as brass. No modesty a-tall. And this fool nephew of mine aiming to marry that yeller-headed one. She's sure good-looking all right, and she ain't hiding it none, neither. He, he, he!"

Suddenly Ted reached in, and, seizing the observer by the collar of his faded raincoat, dragged Uncle Gilbert out into the open.

"Why, you damned old Peeping Tom!" he stormed. "What do you mean by spying on those ladies as if they were doing something questionable, and insulting them with your remarks? Haven't you ever seen a modern bathing suit before? By golly! I've a good mind to break every bone in your body."

He was shaking the spare form of his relative back and forth in his stout grip, and was so worked up that he might have put his threat into effect, if at that moment he had not seen Phyllis and the others ascending the path toward him.

"We're coming out now." She waved a bare, shapely arm to him. "None of us want to, but Arthur says the car is probably fixed by this time, and that we ought to be starting on."

Ted ceased manhandling his squirming captive, and pretended to be merely shaking hands with him. He was ashamed to let Phyllis know he had such a scurvy kinsman.

"Come over here," he called to her. "This is my Uncle Gilbert, my father's brother."

NATURALLY and without the slightest trace of self-consciousness she advanced; but as she neared them she seemed to sense the leering gaze bent upon her, and she stopped and involuntarily drew back, a wave of color dyeing her white neck and shoulders.

Hastily she shook out the bathing cape she was carrying on her arm and wrapped it closely around her. Then she came on.

For Ted's sake she masked the disgust she felt for this obscene old man, and was cordial in her manner toward him. This was a mistake; for Uncle Gilbert, being used to nothing but scowls and sharp words from the other sex, got an idea into his goatish old head that she was trying to "make" him.

The spot where they stood talking was a sort of knoll, rising above the surface of the surrounding table-land, and, looking off from it across the ravine, Phyllis descried a highway in the distance along which vehicles were passing and repassing.

"Why, that is the road we came along yesterday," she exclaimed. "I remember that funny pink farmhouse

off yonder." Then her brows contracted in a puzzled frown. "But that doesn't seem more than a mile away from here," she said, "and we must have traveled fully ten miles from it before we reached the ranch."

"You did," assented Ted. "Don't you remember that I showed you on the floral map at our luncheon how the highway almost circles the ranch?"

"But how silly?" she cried. "We must change all that, Ted; build a connecting road across there and put a bridge over the ravine."

"He, he!" tittered Uncle Gilbert, as if it was a good joke. "Give you your way and you'd make quite a few changes around here, I guess?"

"Oh, yes—I expect to," she said coolly. "Father Trevor told me I could have anything I wanted, and we have already arranged to put in an eighteen-hole golf course, and now I'm set on this bridge."

Uncle Gilbert's face darkened.

"A golf course?" he snarled. "Where?"

"Over there." She pointed off to the pasture land. "They say it will cost only twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars."

It looked for a minute as if the old man would pass away.

"Twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars!" he gasped. "And turning good land into a tramping place for a pack of idle fools to knock a pill over!"

"Nonsense!" laughed Phyllis. "When that course is put in, and you once start to playing over it, you'll be as much of a bug over the game as any of the rest of us."

"And that reminds me of another thing, Ted," she went on. "This swimming pool is wonderful, but it ought to be improved. I've been studying its possibilities, and I think if it was widened by blasting out the rocks on the other side, and then have a flight of decorative stone steps leading down to it, and roses planted all around the sides, it would be simply ideal."

Uncle Gilbert threw up his hands.

"Listen to her!" he yelled shrilly. "Next thing she'll be wanting to have the steers hand-painted. Let me tell you somep'n, young woman." He pounded the ground viciously with his cane. "There ain't none of them fool things going to be done. No golf courses, no bridges, no swimming pools with roses around 'em. What are they going to use for money to do it all with, I'd like to know?"

"Sides, I won't have it!" he spluttered. "This here ranch is practically mine—I mean," he caught himself up, "it ain't theirs, not for more'n a few days longer, nohow. Don't let 'em fool you, kid." He gave her a sly smirk. "That brother of mine and this fool boy here is both great hands at throwin' the bull; but they ain't got a red cent between 'em. In less 'n thirty days they're going to get chucked off the place neck and crop, and the only roof they can get to cover 'em is at the poor-house.

"No; if you're looking for money—and that's what you stage gals mostly is—you'd better shine up to me. I'm the only one in the Trevor family that's got it."

CHAPTER VI.

ON A NEW TACK.

SOME bombshell Uncle Gilbert had exploded! It's hard to say what the effects of it might have been if it had not been for Jim Barnes.

Realizing to some extent what was coming, he had quick-wittedly worked himself around behind the old man; and now as the spiteful disclosure was sputtered he significantly tapped his forehead.

"An old miser with bats in his belfry," he whispered to Rose Regley, who stood near him, and who he knew would pass the word on to the others.

Ted saw his pal's action and blessed him for it. But apparently Jim's friend-

ly partisanship wasn't needed in one quarter, for, with Uncle Gilbert's words, Phyllis had slipped her arm defensively into Ted's, as if to show that she stood with him.

At the same time there was an angry flash in her eyes at the old fellow's insulting tone toward her, and a scathing retort was evidently trembling on her lips.

But she must have remembered that this was a member of the family; for she held back the verbal punch she was preparing to deliver, and instead elected to treat the matter as a joke.

"Well, now, isn't that sweet music to the ears of an industrious little gold digger?" she laughed lightly. "You see, Ted, that even if you jilt me or go broke, I'll not be left on my uppers. Heaven will protect the working girl."

The sarcasm of it passed completely over Uncle Gilbert's head, however. He thought that his boast of being the only rich Trevor had excited her mercenary interest, and that, if she was satisfied of the fact, she would dump his impecunious nephew for him in a minute.

"Shrewd little baggage, ain't you?" he smirked at her. "You ain't letting go your hooks on Teddy boy until you are sure that what I say is right. But don't take my word for it. Ask Pohlman over at the Laidlaw Bank. He'll tell you that this here bunch of spend-thrifts ain't got no longer to stay at Plateau Ranch than it 'd take a jack rabbit to jump across it."

"But there are jack rabbits and jack rabbits." She still insisted on taking his livery stable repartee as a game of banter. "The one you are talking about might be a wizened old thing, so tight and hidebound that he could make no speed at all.

"Which reminds me"—she turned to Blake—"that if we are to start to-day, Arthur, we would better be oscar-ing on.

"So glad to have met you." She bent a gracious smile on Uncle Gil-

bert, which made the old curmudgeon swell up like a turkey cock, and, swinging about, led the way to the station wagon.

Ted hung back a moment behind the others, and seized his beloved relative by the lapel.

"Listen, you!" he hissed. "I've kept my hands off you today; but if I ever catch you looking at or speaking to Miss Duhamel in that way again, I'll lay you like a carpet."

Uncle Gilbert, however, as he watched his husky nephew stride on to join the rest of the party, seemed rather amused than perturbed at the threat.

"Jealous; that's what's the matter with you," he muttered, squinting up his narrow eyes. "Seen her sort o' making up to me, didn't you, and it's drove you wild. Well, you'll be wilder yet before you get through. All her kind is out for is the coin."

"And I don't know," he rubbed his pointed chin ruminatively, "but what I'd be willing to slip a piece of change to that little trick. She's wuth it."

MEANWHILE, the bathers had driven on to the ranch house; but the episode seemed to have left a rather unpleasant taste in their mouths, and although everybody tried to act natural and jolly, it was plain that the effort was forced.

Even the delicious luncheon which Mrs. Trevor had ready for them did not restore the lost spirit of gayety. They ate hurriedly, with the conversation dealing almost entirely with matters relating to the visitors' departure.

It was really with a feeling of relief that Ted saw the party finally loaded up into Blake's big touring car and speeding away down the drive.

"Well, that's that," he said grimly to Jim Barnes and Herb who stood on the veranda beside him. "And now I've got the pleasant job ahead of me to write a letter to Phyllis, telling her

that I'm a cad and a bunk artist and a four-flusher and about 'steen different kinds of liar."

"You didn't tip her off then to the actual state of affairs, before she left?" asked Barnes; for naturally Phyllis and Ted had taken a brief moment alone together to say farewell.

"No. I suppose I'm a coward, but I just couldn't bring myself to spoil those few minutes, the last we'll ever have together." In spite of himself, his voice quivered slightly, and he went on hurriedly: "Anyhow, there wasn't time for all the explaining I've got to do. It seemed better to write."

"You sure saved my bacon," he gripped Jim's hand gratefully, "when that old blatherskite cut loose down there at the swimming hole. It was a time when a feller needs a friend, and you came to the front in great shape."

"But, after all, I don't know that it wouldn't have been better to have let things come to a head and have it over with. It's going to be a tough job to convince her, after what Uncle Gilbert spilled, that this is a sudden catastrophe of which none of us had any knowledge while she was here."

Barnes, who had been gazing thoughtfully away across the ranch, while Ted grumbled on, spoke up a bit hesitantly.

"I don't believe I'd write that letter to Phyllis, if I were you," he said. "Not just yet, anyhow."

"But I can't let her go on, thinking that everything here is hotsy-totsy," protested Ted. "Not write her? What the heck are you driving at? I don't get you at all."

"Well, it's something like the old story of the bozo who made a complete flop as a blacksmith, but discovered all at once that he had a voice, and with a little study turned himself into a famous grand opera star."

"I listened to what Herb told us last night about the ranch being a losing proposition," Barnes went on; "and,

of course, I had to agree with him. But all the time, there was something in the back of my head arguing that with a proper shift of gears a different showing could be made.

"In other words, you've got a big, valuable plant here, but it isn't paying, because it isn't being run so as to bring out its full capabilities. Some idea of that sort was what sent me chasing off alone in the rain yesterday afternoon. I thought, maybe, I could figure out a short haulage for your products; but, as Herb showed us last night, that alone wouldn't overcome the deficit.

"Also," he confessed, "I was considering the possibilities of the ravine as a source of water power. A bit hard to dope that out at the present flood stage; but as nearly as I could estimate, there isn't enough head to the stream in normal times to do more than serve domestic purposes. No commercial value to it, what I mean. So that looked like a washout, too."

HE paused, and Ted gave a disparaging sniff.

"Mighty good of you to go to all that trouble," Ted said; "but—well, why should it keep me from writing to Phyllis? Far as I can see, it doesn't improve the situation any."

"It doesn't," admitted Jim; "of itself. But it leads up to the idea I was getting at, and which came to me this morning when Phyllis suggested turning that pasture land into a golf links. As she said, it would make an ideal course—in fact, as I visualize it, one of the best in the country. And that, old dear, is the solution to your problem."

Ted stared at him with his mouth open.

"Are you nutty, or am I?" he demanded. "Do you mean to tell me that the ranch can be saved by a golf course? How do you get that way?"

"Simple," laughed Barnes. "Now it may not be true that the world will

beat a path to the door of the man who invents a superior mousetrap; but it's an unquestioned fact that golf cracks will very quickly find out a superior course, and will want to come to it. Not only that, but they'll bring a gallery with them. And those people will have to have some place to stop.

"Oh, I see!" Herb spoke up with sudden comprehension. "A resort hotel."

"Exactly," nodded Barnes. "And not only for golf players, either. Look what you've got here. A warm spring, which, if you fix up the swimming hole according to Phyllis's ideas, will let you advertise all-year-round bathing. A big ranch equipment which will permit you without extra cost to run the place as a dude outfit.

"Mountains within easy ride. A convenient stop-over between Banff and Yellowstone Park. Scenery. Climate. Hunting. Fishing. Nature's wonderland. Gee! I could sit down right now, and write a folder that would make your hair curl."

"Hold on! Hold on!" Ted broke in. "I don't want to be a wet blanket, or anything of that sort. But it seems to me you're overlooking one mighty vital objection; and this is, the difficulty of access. We're too far away from both the highway and the railroad. Even the most rabid golf bugs won't stand for being jounced over these rough trails."

The engineer snapped his fingers disdainfully.

"Pooh, pooh for that! And, likewise, tush!" he said. "We'll borrow another suggestion from Phyllis, and by bridging the ravine, build a road right across the ranch. In that way, we'll bring all the through motor traffic right past the door of our hotel; for who is going to drive all the way around that semicircle of the State highway, when by taking our short cut he can save ten miles and get a better road?"

"By George!" exclaimed Ted, un-

able any longer to repress his elation. "I believe you've got it."

"Believe?" chimed in Herb. "I'll tell the cockeyed world he has. Why, the ordinary activities of the ranch, which won't be interfered with in any way, will pay all the running expenses, and leave all profits from the resort end of it as so much clear velvet."

"Just that," grinned Jim. "The two lines will dovetail right into each other like ham and eggs, and you'll be turning into coin a lot of natural advantages which are now going to waste—in other words, using all the capabilities of your plant, which is the best kind of efficiency."

IMPULSIVELY Ted thrust an arm into that of each of his companions.

"Come on," he said. "We've got to go into conference over this right away. Oh, by golly, Jim! It looks, it really looks as if, between you, you and Phyllis had hit upon a life-saver."

He led them hurriedly upstairs, and there with Herb figuring away like mad, and all of them excitedly shouting fresh suggestions at each other, they began to thresh out the details.

"Make a rough general estimate to start with, Herb," directed Barnes, "allowing plenty of margin to each item. We can take up the question of economies and saving later; but just now, we want to get an idea of what we are letting ourselves in for."

"We'll need," he checked off on his fingers, "a fifty-room hotel at the beginning, which can be enlarged as occasion demands; the golf course; the swimming pool; four miles of concrete roadway twenty-seven feet wide; and a hundred-foot bridge across the ravine. There will also have to be garages, a club house and casino, bathing houses and a lot of junk of that sort; but you can offset that by the fact that we'll get our lumber off the ranch, and our stone for the buildings as well as for the roadway from the rock we blast out to make the swimming pool."

"Another place we'll save," he added, "is at the bridge. The walls of the ravine with a very little concrete reinforcement will serve as abutments, and we'll be spared all the expense of masonry for piers and approaches. All we'll require is a single hundred-foot steel span. Now, as to the hotel—"

"But why bother to build a hotel?" Herb broke in, with uplifted pencil. "Why not use the ranch house?"

"No," declared Ted with emphasis. "This is my father's and mother's home, and it's going to be mine and Phyllis, too; and I don't intend to have it all cluttered up with boarders rowing about the meals and yelping because they weren't called for the seven forty-five."

Herb seemed inclined to argue the point. To his efficient soul, this seemed a shiftless waste of their resources. But Jim Barnes backed Ted in his stand.

"That's right," he said. "Let the cobbler stick to his last. If we start to run a hotel, chances are we'd lose all we took in, and go on the rocks in addition. What we want to do is put up a modern building, especially designed for its purpose, and convenient to both the golf course and the swimming pool—I've the very site for it in mind—and then turn it over to an experienced hotel man at a fixed rental."

"The same way with everything else," he advised. "Put it all out on concession, and save ourselves headaches. And keep the ranch house entirely free and separate from the resort end."

"Let that remain as it is now, a home and a refuge, and a center for the cattle and farming activities."

So, with that settled, Herb went ahead on his calculations; and finally, after several technical discussions between himself and Barnes, was able to announce the result.

He started to read off his estimate on the separate items, explaining his figures in detail; but Ted broke in.

"Oh, we'll take your word for all that," he said impatiently. "Let us have the grand total. That is what I want to get at."

"Well," said Herb not without a touch of pride, "it can all be done for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Possibly you can shave that by twenty or thirty thousand if you are lucky; but you should have the full amount on call, in order to provide for emergencies."

SOMEHOW, the actual naming of those figures rather made them pause and glance at one another. They had all three been so excited over the scheme that the financial aspect of it had rather lapsed into a secondary place.

But now this feature leaped right out into the foreground, and had a distinctly sobering effect upon them. Even Herb, who hitherto like a bank clerk had been concerning himself solely with figures rather than with any thought of real money, began to look a bit staggered.

"A quarter of a million!" muttered Ted. "Gee! That is some bank roll. Where are we going to get it, will you tell me?"

"That brings up another thought," added Jim Barnes. "We've been awfully free in deciding what we were going to do, and what we were going to have. But haven't we rather been forgetting that none of us, not even Ted, has any say in the matter at all."

"The ranch is Mr. Trevor's, and he might have serious objection to seeing it turned upside down as we are planning. Don't you think then, that we ought to take him into consultation before we do anything further?"

"That's the ticket," agreed Herb eagerly. "He's had a lot more practical experience than any of us, and he might be able to show us a lot of ways to save expense. Besides, he's the one who'll have to stand behind and guaran-

tee any plan for raising the required capital. Possibly, it wouldn't offer any problem to him at all."

But Ted shook his head.

"Not on your life," he said decidedly. "I know Pop. He'd either dismiss the whole subject with a wave of the hand, if it happened to hit against some prejudice of his; or else he'd go to enlarging and expanding on the idea until he'd run it out of all reason."

"No," he repeated; "before I bring him into it, I want everything worked out on paper to the last detail, the money all promised and arranged for, and nothing for him to do but sign on the dotted line."

"This is up to us, I tell you." He slumped down in his chair, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, knitted his brows. "Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars! That's a whale of a lot of money. But, on the other hand, we've got a whale of a scheme."

"Thank the Lord," he muttered, "that Phyllis isn't around, while we're all up in the air this way. We'll need all our brains to work this out; and if she was around—"

He was interrupted by a honk from the horn of an automobile ascending the drive, and glancing from the window, gave a gasp of dismay.

"Hell's bells!" he exclaimed. "They've come back. Now what does that mean?"

He was not long left in doubt. When he and his two companions rushed down to the door, they were met with the explanation that the light shower which had passed over the ranch the afternoon before, had turned into a veritable cloudburst to the east of them.

With bridges gone, miles of road-way washed out, and all the streams on a rampage, Blake and the party in his touring car, since all accommodations at Laidlaw were already jammed with marooned travelers, had no other recourse but to return to the ranch and bespeak the hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Trevor.

It would be at least a week, they said, before they could continue their journey.

CHAPTER VII.

SOMEBODY STARTS TO SNOOP.

NO sooner had Phyllis and the rest of the returned wanderers gone up to their rooms to change from traveling garb, and, as Rose Regley put it, to get their fresh war-paint on, than Ted hurriedly gathered his two comrades once more into conference.

"Look here," he said desperately. "I've got to decide right away whether to make a clean breast to Phyllis, or go ahead and deliberately trick her on the chance that everything will come out right in the end. I can't shilly-shally any longer. I've got to choose one horn of the dilemma, and stick to it.

"But I'm in no condition to exercise cool judgment." He spread out his hands helplessly. "It's too vital a matter with me. I'm all upset. I don't trust myself. I balk at either course. So I've determined to put myself in your hands, and abide by whatever you two agree upon. You both know all the circumstances, and I am sure you will consider only my best interests. Now what as true friends would you advise me to do?"

Jim Barnes ruminatively puffed at his pipe for a minute or two as he considered the question.

"Well," he said at last, "it seems to be pretty conclusively proved by human experience that honesty is always the best policy."

"You think I ought to tell her then?" Ted looked a little aghast.

"No; I wouldn't go so far as to say that, because there's a good deal of question here as to just what constitutes honesty. It certainly wouldn't be honest to tell her that you are broke and going to be thrown off the ranch in thirty days when such may easily not be the case at all.

"Way I look at it, Ted," he puffed at his pipe again, "you've tried to be fair with her. You haven't intentionally evaded the issue. But the very stars in their courses seem to have fought against letting you tell her. So why not take that as an indication?"

"Of course," he admitted, "she's apt to get wise. If she does, you'll show up in a pretty bum light, but not much worse than if you were to spill the story to her now. Then, too, if the crash comes, it's all over between you and her anyhow. If it doesn't, and our scheme works out, you can tell her then, and will only gain credit for trying to spare her anxiety.

"So, since you ask my advice," once more he took counsel of his pipe, "I'd say, keep on stalling, at least until we know more definitely whether or not we can put over this resort deal."

"That goes for me, too," nodded Herb vigorously. "If everybody who is in financial straits went around advertising the fact, there'd be a panic in the country within twenty-four hours.

"There's another view to take of the matter, too," he pleaded. "You'll need all the pep and nerve and brains you've got for this deal we're working on; and what 'll be the result if you tell her of the jam, and admit that you were only bluffing when you promised her a golf course and a swimming pool and all the rest of it?"

"Chances are, she and you will have a falling out; and you'll be dopey and miserable, licked so far as any effort goes toward saving the ranch. A sheer loss of efficiency. On the other hand, if you don't tell her, you'll be on your toes, scheming and working every minute so as to prove to her that you've made good."

TED felt instinctively that there was sophistry in these arguments. Still, since they rather coincided with his own inclinations, and since he had agreed to be guided by his two friends, he allowed himself to be persuaded.

Perhaps, though, it was Jim Barnes's final shot that clinched his decision.

"You ought to think something of the girl, too," urged Jim. "Here she is landed at the ranch for a week, and no chance to get away. And you're preparing to explode a charge of dynamite like this on her. Nice, rotten time you're fixing to give her, I must say."

"All right, all right," Ted assented hastily. "You win. I'll do as you say. But let me tell you, we want to get right down to our scheme and work fast. Bamboozling Phyllis for a single morning is one thing, and keeping it up for a whole week is quite another. If I don't crack and blow up under the strain, I'll certainly be gray-haired at the end of it.

"Besides," his brow darkened, "I'm leery of this darned Arthur Blake. That cloudburst over east may have been all that he says it was; but there's always a way to get through or around those things, if a person really wants to. Looks to me as if he'd got to mulling over that stuff Uncle Gilbert dropped, and had simply used the cloudburst as an excuse to come back and verify his suspicions, and, if possible, put a spoke in my wheel with Phyllis."

These doubts of the suave and rather reserved Blake were strengthened later in the evening, when Jim Barnes reported a conversation that he'd had with the theatrical man.

"He began buzzing up to me right after supper," Jim told Ted and Herb, when the three gathered at a midnight council. "Nothing nosey or inquisitive about it, you understand; he was smooth as butter. But just the same, he put me through a cross-examination that would have done credit to Clarence Darrow.

"First off, he began talking about the golf course, and he agreed with me that no better site for it could be found than that stretch of pasture land. Then he took up the swimming pool, and he

asked me a lot of questions as to the feasibility of Phyllis's ideas in regard to it.

"But what he seemed most interested in," said the engineer, "was how I was planning to bridge the ravine and lay out that short cut road to the highway. Gee! I thought he'd never get done quizzing me on that. And he's no slouch on the subject, either, let me tell you. He knew what to ask all right."

"And probably jollied you into thinking you were the eighth wonder of the world?" put in Herb sarcastically.

"Well, if he did, he wouldn't have been far wrong," Jim grinned back. "But there was nothing so crude as that. Instead, he began to discuss figures.

"Has Mr. Trevor sanctioned all these extensive improvements?" he said.

"Well, he told Ted and Phyllis they could go as far as they liked," I came back at him. "That's good enough, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," he said. "But what you are setting out to do is a regular multimillionaire's order; and cattle ranches, I gather, are no bonanzas just at present.

"I've been wondering," he shot me a look out of the corner of his eye, "if possibly young Trevor isn't planning to bolster up the family fortunes by operating a resort here?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," I told him. "I'm only the engineer on the job. If you want to find that out, you'll have to ask Ted himself."

"I think I shall," he said; "for if there's any such project in the wind, I'd rather like to have a bit of stock in it."

TED leaped to his feet with a scornful gesture, as Jim concluded the recital.

"Yes; he'd like to buy stock!" he sneered contemptuously. "He was just trying to pump you, and he'll prob-

ably follow it up by making a bluff offer of the same kind to me. That will give him a chance to inquire as to our resources, don't you see? And, if he learns, as he evidently suspects, that we are operating on wind, he'll carry his information to Phyllis and try to queer me with her. That's all he's after.

"I'll tell you," he slammed his fist down on the table, "we've got to switch that bird off the scent somehow, and the only way I can see to do it is to out-bluff him. If he comes to me with any phony offer to buy stock, I'll admit to him that we're working on the resort idea. He's wise enough to know, as he says, that nobody but a millionaire bootlegger 'd be doing all that for a private show; but I'll tell him there's no stock for sale and give him the impression that we've got our capital already raised."

"M-m-m!" commented Barnes dubiously. "Maybe? But that guy is a pretty slick article, let me tell you. He may not stop with your say-so. He may continue his investigations."

"Ah!" returned Ted. "But we've got to back it up by pretending to commence actual operations. Listen! There's an old rock-crusher here at the ranch, and we'll trundle that down to the ravine, and set off a couple of blasts of dynamite at the swimming pool. Make a lot of noise and bustle, don't you know, and give a general semblance of activity. That'll make him think there's really something doing; and we ought to be able to fake enough stuff to keep him fooled for the short time he'll be here."

"Besides," he added, "it'll help me in stalling Phyllis along. Whenever she touches on delicate ground, I can shift the subject to the improvements, and rush her off to see something new we are up to."

A clock on the mantelpiece struck one, as Ted finished the sentence; and he gave a start, his face clouding over as a reminder.

"Wow!" he muttered, dropping down again into his chair. "That means another day gone; and although this business of hoodwinking Blake is all right, it is only keeping us away from our real problem. Seems to me, with only twenty-seven days left now to save the ranch, we'd better be putting in our most serious licks at that."

"Well, we've got the scheme to do it with," Herb spoke up. "All we need now is the money."

"Yes," said Ted bitterly; "and if I was drowning in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, all I'd need is a boat. But, tell me, how I'm going to get it?"

"Sure." Herb blinked at them through his glasses. "That's easy. Why, when I got to thinking the matter over, I was surprised that the answer hadn't occurred to us at once. Where do people go when they want money? I mean, who makes a business of loaning it?"

"Why, the banks of course. But—"

HOLD on a second. What was our original idea in coming up here? It was to cut out waste and inefficiency, wasn't it, so that by showing a prospect of increased earnings, we could go to the Laidlaw Bank, and ask for an extension on your father's mortgages?

"Well, we failed at that," he drove on. "But instead we've hatched out this new scheme, which is a whole lot better. At least, we all think so, and it also seems to have struck Blake favorably; for I have a kind of idea that he isn't just bluffing. I believe he thinks it's a good thing, and really wants to horn in. And if it impresses us and him that way, why wouldn't it impress other people the same?"

"So what I suggest," he beamed upon them, "is that we pay a visit to the Laidlaw Bank first thing in the morning, lay our cards on the table, and tell this Pohlman, or whoever is the main guy there, that we'd thank

him kindly for about two hundred and fifty thousand of his best."

"But you can't borrow money from a bank without security, you chump," objected Ted. "And all we've got is an idea."

"Just so. But, as I understand it, we are not going to borrow the money. All we want is to find out if the bank is willing to make an additional loan of that amount to your father on the strength of these proposed improvements to the ranch. Mr. Trevor, of course, will have to take over the actual business of it, after we have let him into the secret."

"I see." Ted nodded with no great enthusiasm. "And I suppose it's the only thing to do. But I'd rather give that Pohlman a kick in the pants than go asking any favors of him after the way he treated pop."

"Oh, you don't want to look at it that way," Herb contended. "It's really you who are doing him the favor by showing him how to get back the money he has already loaned without having to resort to foreclosure, and at the same time providing him an advantageous channel for new investment. That's his business, remember; to rent out money. If it was renting houses, you wouldn't think he was doing a special favor to lease one to you."

"Something in that, I guess," Ted muttered. "All right; I'll tackle him. But you fellows have got to do the talking. If the old fox-face should pull any cracks about pop I'm apt to give him a sock in the jaw."

"Us do the talking?" Jim Barnes gave a shake of the head. "Don't you think it would be more businesslike for you to go alone?"

"No," Ted insisted stubbornly. "We're all in this together, and I need you to paint those railroad folder word pictures of yours, and Herb to back them up with his figures. I'd only get in a muddle."

So it was finally agreed, and next morning the three started off for town, Herb armed with a portentous detailed and diagrammed statement of probable costs and profits which he had spent most of the night in preparing.

They reached the bank, a story and a half stone structure with barred windows; but as they piled out of the car, they paused on the sidewalk for a last-moment parley before storming the fortress.

And while they stood there, seeking to buck up their courage, who should come briskly walking out of the bank but Arthur Blake.

For a second, he seemed almost as disconcerted over the encounter as were they. But he quickly recovered his poise, and advanced, smilingly, toward them.

"What's this?" he hailed. "A hold-up of the bank? If so, give me a gun and a mask, and I'll join in. But I warn you there are worse bandits inside there than any on the road. That fellow Pohlman actually charged me for cashing a New York draft."

"Oh?" gulped Ted. "Then you've met him?"

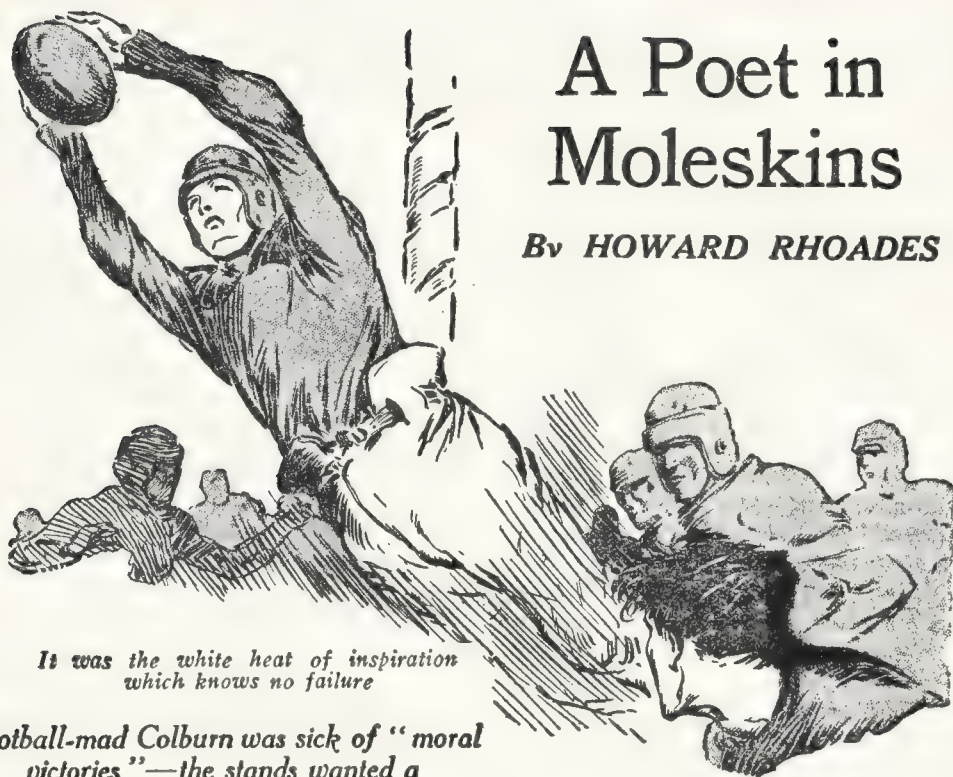
"Yes; I had quite a little talk with him, and found he isn't nearly so tight with his conversation as he is with his money. In fact"—Blake paused—"he proved to be a regular mine of information about people and things around here."

"Well"—he waved his hand, seemingly unconscious of Ted's stricken face—"I've got to be toddling along, boys. See you out at the ranch at dinner."

Ted gazed after his retreating form with murder in his eye.

"Did you see that self-satisfied grin on him?" he groaned. "He's wormed all he wants to know out of Pohlman, the skunk; and now he's off to spill the sensational news to Phyllis, and prepare a pleasant reception for me when I get home."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



A Poet in Moleskins

By HOWARD RHOADES

*It was the white heat of inspiration
which knows no failure*

*Football-mad Colburn was sick of "moral
victories"—the stands wanted a
win or the coach's scalp*

THE city directory of Colburn, seat of the State University of Ohwanis, contained the name of only one football coach, Dr. Fremont Walsh; but at the moment when a fleet back of Pitts College pushed a lone Ohwanis tackler in the face and ran twenty-five yards for a touchdown, fully ten thousand coaches jumped to their feet to scream derisively.

"What tackling!" cried John W. Spillman—"Jack" on the badge of the Votary Luncheon Club—adding something which sounded like the first name of a noted New Testament character.

"Gawd, wotta dumb-bell!" screamed a little newsie hanging from the top tier of the vast concrete stadium.

Both the business man and the newsie were coaches. And so were the nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-eight others in the stadium—bankers, brokers, street car conductors, meat

cutters, bootleggers, retired capitalists and scavengers. For in Colburn, city of three hundred and fifty thousand, which sprawls around the State University of Ohwanis and feels that it owns the school, everybody is a coach.

And if they owe for their cars, their homes, and the snappy clothes on their backs—very collegiate in cut—they go to football. The late Kaiser's assurance of a heaven-sent commission to rule humanity is puerile compared with the certainty of every Colburn fan that he, and he only, can coach the Ohwanis State eleven, and do it right.

Certainly on this Saturday afternoon, one week before the final and crowning game of the season, that against State's famous rival, the University of Bellevue, everybody was loudly sure he would make a better coach than Dr. Fremont Walsh. And down below, the slender hands of Dr. Walsh, the coach, just beginning to

show the larger veins of middle age, tightened. He knew the crisis was here.

He glanced up with some such sinking feeling as a Christian martyr might have looked up at the pagan stands of Rome, expecting for a moment some show of mercy, then realizing that those frenzied thousands above were more than strangers. They were enemies who would never understand.

The game ended, another defeat for Ohwanis State.

Silently, and with dull, discouraged eyes, Dr. Walsh picked up his overcoat from a bench and started toward the players' quarters under the tower at the foot of the great concrete horse-shoe. The players, plodding figures under great blankets, stalked moodily into the locker room. The coach did not approach them as they pulled off their damp, soggy harness with curses and grumbling. He merely shook his head and moved mechanically into a small office at one side. What could he say to them that he had not said?

Then his hand went to his side pocket, with a sense of loss. His notebook, the one in which he jotted down plays by day and by night, was gone. He realized it must have slipped out as his coat lay on that bench. He stepped out a side door and passed under the end of the great stadium. The last few feet were shuffling down the ramps above. The twilight of late season already was closing in.

On his way back to the bench the coach passed men with bits of sod patching the turf where it had been kicked bare. One of these raised his head as the mentor passed.

"Good eve, docater," he greeted. "Poota back some sod, so good for Bellevue game!"

"Righto, Tony!" said Dr. Walsh to the Italian caretaker, who was a famous university character.

He reached the bench and, in the deepening gloom, found his book. As he came back past the laborers, their

boss, the swart Tony, a man of genial, snapping black eye and waving mustache, came over to him.

"Toofa luck, docater, we lose. But we ween nexta Sat!"

"I hope so, Tony."

"I know what you got—a toofa job. Like long ago, docater, in Rome. I was keed there before come-a heer. In school I read how peoples long time always want da veecter. They holler loud for man so long he keel lion, or emporer so long he ween war. They geev him laurel. But when he no ween—bah!—no good. They geev him instead laurel on the head—a breck!"

"True, Tony. How's the family?"

"Good. Only Harvey, he got tonsils out, and Barrington break arm play football. But, Docater Walsh, soon is come anodder!"

"Another! You mean—"

"Yeah, sure! Theesa week, maybe!"

"Tony, the school will be making you papa emeritus."

"Ha—ha! Huskie maybe to win games!"

To win games! The chant of the unthinking masses echoing even from the lips of understanding Tony. Dr. Walsh found his car and whirled across the river toward the wooded ridge, where stood the fashionable suburb of Arlington.

He loved Arlington as he loved the mother city, Colburn, and five, nay, two years ago, would have said that here he would finish his days. But now— He shook his head and sighed as he walked toward his door. Some one inside had been listening for his car. The door opened and in it, silhouetted against the soft light, stood a girl. She ran out, as she made sure who it was, and threw her arms around him. He kissed her and allowed himself to be led inside.

"It's almost ready, dad," she said in a soft, cajoling voice. "So you won't be long. And, dad, that old game—don't let it worry you."

She was close to him—a slender girl of twenty-one with white, sensitive hands, and sympathetic blue eyes. He bent down to kiss her again and found his eyes a trifle misty.

"Jeanie," he said, as if in apology, "why must you have the burdens your poor, dear mother—"

"Dad!" she comforted. "Now it isn't so bad."

"Jeanie, it is bad!" His strong hands gripped her slim shoulders and his piercing, dark eyes, beneath gray hair—eyes which set off a face that was proud and sensitive—stared into hers as if he had reached a decision.

"It is bad, and I've been wondering how and when to tell you. They're after me, Jeanie, and they're going to get me."

"Dad," she remonstrated, "you the coach for fifteen years—"

"And my team Conference champions only three times in that period. That's what the paper said yesterday—after the town had been saying it a year. But this game to-day it's the finish!"

"Now, Daddy Walsh, you stop! Go wash up and you'll feel better. There are oysters, dad, just the way you like them."

She pushed him toward the stairway, then followed him. "Dad, you won't mind, I've asked Ted."

"No, dear. Only I'm afraid—"

"No, you won't. You'll get to talking with him about beating Bellevue next week and you'll forget all about—about—to-day."

THE coach slowly climbed the stairs. Forget about to-day? Already the details of the games had escaped him. But something more serious was to contemplate: the game's results. He was thinking of his son, Jim, off there in the East at his own alma mater; of Lila, the other daughter, in her first year at the aristocratic—and costly—old school of her mother.

To educate them and to buy this fine home he had invented plays and cooked up defenses, had scouted for prospects, addressed luncheon clubs, had been damned for poor teams and bombastically praised for winners. He had encouraged lads with grit and brains, but delicate bodies; had whipped on men of enormous physique, but slow wit; had rolled in the mud to teach tackling, and soared into the clouds to inspire that idealism which cannot be beaten. He had been a good, faithful coach. But, unfortunately, not a super-human one.

Now he faced the loss of his job. And that would mean a big cut in income. For what man, past fifty and repudiated by a leading college, will be picked up by a smaller one at anything like the ten thousand dollars which Dr. Walsh had been drawing here? And what doctor of medicine who had given the twenty best preparatory years to coaching football, could suddenly go back to medicine and make the income he must have?

And beneath this physical dilemma was another consideration—something even more basic with this proud, sensitive man—something which he never had discussed with any one.

Dr. Walsh descended the stairs and gripped the hand of Ted Lambert. Lambert, young, alert, slender, made up in determination what he lacked in weight. He was a member of the Varsity football squad, whose face was stamped strongly with a delicate idealism and soulfulness. Those who saw him on the side lines might have dismissed him as a poet in moleskins.

"Well, Ted!" Dr. Walsh began cheerfully.

"Terrible," pronounced Ted. "And that down town crowd—"

"Forget them!" said Walsh, his acerbity betraying his concern. "Now, Jeanie, strut your stuff!"

Despite something forbidding in the coach's eyes, Ted again brought up the subject.

"This game to-day wasn't so important. But next Saturday—"

"Next Saturday against a team twice as good," said the coach, decidedly a snappy tone in his voice.

"Well—well, the fellows are going to try twice as hard."

"They'll have to do better than that," said Dr. Walsh.

Lambert felt rebuked, and more unnerved and awkward than since the first time he called on Jeanie Walsh, overwhelmed by being received into the home of the coach. A shy, self-conscious lad, he still wondered at times why Jeanie liked him, with so many other greater players around.

He said nothing more about football. They had almost finished dinner when the doorbell rang and Jeanie answered. She ushered in a large, well-dressed man with an important air. Then she returned to her father and announced Mr. Spillman.

Dr. Walsh went directly to the visitor. The glass doors between the young people and the living room were ajar, and they heard the greeting.

"Just came from dinner at the club," said Spillman. "Several of us got talking. This might be better Monday or Tuesday, but I got a binus"—Mr. Spillman doubtless meant business—"trip for the first of the week. Now, doc, I know you've had a damn poor lot of material this year, but, doc, we got to look at this from a binus angle. Now for the future of this town, and binus, doc, something's got—"

They heard no more. Dr. Walsh had closed the door. Jeanie toyed with her spoon, color mounting to her cheeks. Lambert stared at her in impotent misery. Then he blurted: "Say, Jeanie, if your dad would only stick me in that game Saturday, I'd show 'em. I'd—"

He halted. She did not look up. He plunged into the subject: "Why doesn't he give me a chance? I'm good. I played on Springdale High two seasons—on the Varsity."

Jeanie looked up. "I asked him once," she said.

"What did he say? Go on. I can stand it."

"He said you were one of many. Oh, Ted, I don't want to hurt you. But you know there are more than a hundred men out, and you're only a sophomore, and light. Other things being equal, juniors and seniors have the call over you, because they've been out longer. He says it's hard to choose because there are so many men about equally as good—"

"That's it," he interrupted bitterly. "Just about as good! They're all that—a dead level—no stars. Jeanie, I could take that ball and—"

The front door slammed and Dr. Walsh appeared. He was very pale. Jeanie was about to rise in concern, but he restrained her. "If you'll excuse me," he said, "I'll go upstairs. I have some writing to do."

IN the room, which he had occupied since four years ago, when the family cares had been left to himself and the self-sacrificing Jeanie, he sat staring at the picture of his late wife. His "writing" was a difficult task. For Dr. Walsh never had prepared a resignation before.

The days before the game with Bellevue were days of dissension, rumor and disappointment. Nightly, as Dr. Walsh motored home, there rose before him boyish faces of exasperation and failure. The spirit was not there. Cohesion was lacking. They were split among themselves. Some insidious magic had robbed them of the spirited unity which sweeps all before it. To him they seemed like men of wood, stolid and lifeless, at the very hour when he needed men of steel, full of resiliency and fire.

The collegiate Ford of Ted Lambert rattled up to the Walsh home. As he entered his excitement seemed suddenly tempered with a show of reluctance. "Your father—" he began.

"He's in the library with a caller—another of those business men! Won't you wait?"

Lambert consented, but paced the room nervously. She was begging for his message when her father appeared. Walsh took leave of his visitor unconscious of Lambert's presence.

As the door closed, Lambert burst out: "They've done it—the traitors!"

"What?"

"Heavy Boggs, president of the Varsity Association, resigned to-night as a protest. Can you imagine that, with the big game ahead?"

"I can imagine anything. Ted, when a banker, a big man of affairs, comes to my house to demand that we win games—in the name of business! So Heavy Boggs—the man I thought my friend. Why, Ted—"

The coach's voice almost broke. He dropped into a chair. "That's the awful part, Ted. They don't trust me."

"Doctor!" Lambert's voice was filled with intense sympathy as he stood there motionless and awkward. He was almost terrified as the coach's head dropped forward in his hands.

"It isn't losing games, for that's to be expected, or being criticized for losing them, nor giving up my home here and my plans for Jim and Lila and Jeanie. But the fact that they don't believe in me any more. That's what hurts."

A big moment descended upon Ted Lambert. He became no longer the self-conscious sophomore before the famous coach. He was a knight with a halo of idealism kneeling before his deity. He dropped to his knees beside the man with the bowed head, and said in a low, shaky voice:

"Coach, they've made it tough for you. But there's a few fellows on that team that believe in you and will be playing for you Saturday. Hartigan, Reynolds, and others are all right. And I—"

Dr. Walsh raised his head, surprised at the clammy hands which had

gripped his wrists. Lambert raised himself, stricken awkward again at the look in the coach's eyes.

"I shouldn't have carried tales and made you feel bad, Dr. Walsh," he said. "But it hurts me, the way they're doing. When you won those three Conference championships, doctor, I was just a kid in high school and I used to watch you down there on the sidelines, and I began loving—I mean liking you then, and I resolved if ever—if ever—"

He was helpless again, deep in the clay before his god. The deity stooped. "You're a real friend, Ted," Walsh said. "Let's hope that no matter what happens Jeanie and I may see you as the years go on."

There was a knock. Jeanie looked in. "Two men, father," she said.

"More about winning games?"

"I'm afraid so."

THAT hope which is born anew with each initial kick off seemed to prevail when the whistle sounded on the following Saturday afternoon. Inside, the great gray stadium was mottled with the warm colors of autumnal raiment, and rang with the yells of State supporters. After all, those eleven men of Bellevue, clad in the blue and gold, were only men. They did not outweigh State. They had, perhaps, only a tradition of victory. They had beaten all other Conference teams. But they might not be invincible to-day.

A great roar arose from the State supporters, and the great "down town" contingent, as the ball was kicked off. The Bellevue man was speedily downed. The State yell rose in crescendo. Bellevue tried a line plunge. State held them to two yards. The stands cried louder. State held again, and again. Bellevue punted. State failed to gain and tried a forward pass.

It was incomplete. Clearing players showed State's star halfback, Ely, on

the ground, the victim of a hard tackle. The crowd, realizing his identity, leaned forward. But when he came up it was to be led, hobbling off the field. The first break was against State. The vast crowd made its first adjustment toward disappointment.

Others followed. These Bellevue players might be only men, and only weigh as much as State, but that did not prevent the immediate start of a march toward the home team's goal. Twice State rallied and held. One fumble helped. Then, as time in the first quarter grew short, two blue and gold men made a brilliant forward pass that brought the ball near State's goal. Three more plays pushed it over. The goal was kicked. The yell which went up was not one of applause, but the start of a new vocal offense against the poor coaching of Dr. Walsh.

But the knockers relented slightly in the next quarter. There were moments, without question, when State played brilliantly. The scarlet and gray men valiantly defended their goal when next it was in danger. But they lacked the drive to carry the ball against Bellevue. Hartigan, the wily quarter, shone, and Reynolds, the great tackle, plunged steadily, as usual. Yet each exchange of punts found State farther back. The half ended on her ten-yard line, where she was vainly trying to pierce the blue and gold.

Behind closed doors, between halves, Coach Walsh faced his men—and hesitated. Denunciations, scoldings might have been the thing. But, after all, how could he wipe out in five minutes that which had defied him all season? He merely pointed out mistakes and gave counsel. Then, in the moment of the final word his inner heart saw the hopelessness of it all, and groaned. The faces before him were immobile and dumb. Men of wood, lifeless and stolid, when he needed men of steel!

His eyes swept the back row as he said the final word. There, for an

instant, a pair of eyes, alert and searching held his glance. Again he felt the clammy hands which touched his wrists, and wondered at the lad who had knelt before his coach with such a heartfelt plea. Walsh's eyes shifted. His voice sounded far-off as he said: "Now hold them, boys! They've only scored once, and the men I'll spring this quarter are good for two touchdowns."

Dr. Walsh had saved for the second half two of his best ground gainers, Reed and Allen. They were men who had shown brilliantly even against the strongest foes. Reed, the heavier, started the third quarter. But his best contribution was an eight-yard cross buck. Bellevue was watching for him and took pains to stop him.

Worn out before the end of the quarter, he was replaced by Allen, a lighter, faster man, celebrated as a dodger. Once he got around an end for fifteen yards and revived the State supporters. But that was all. The rest of the time he was caught behind the line and thrown for losses.

Meanwhile, Bellevue resumed its march. Desperately Walsh threw in fresh linemen as the wall crumbled. But they failed to stop the rising tide. Only three times State held, and these stands were due to the work of Reynolds, the great tackle.

And when State had the ball the "huddle" would continue its counsel ring interminably. Walsh's fingers tightened, and he shook his head. He knew. They were arguing. They were split against themselves. Finally they punted. A blue and gold man, one of Bellevue's most evasive, ran fiercely through a broken field. Three men in a row leaped at him half-heartedly. He tore on until downed on the fifteen yard line by Reynolds.

Now the stands rang with protest, strident and guttural, against the coach. Those bad tackles were his fault! The pagan host called for its sacrifice. And its fury rose even higher when, in three plays, Bellevue

took the ball over for a second touch-down. It hardly noticed that the blue and gold failed to kick goal.

Nothing more happened that quarter. The first five minutes of the final quarter also were a void. Bellevue, with sufficient margin, let down a trifle. Its coach now put in a few new men to relieve his stars. The State coach, that tall, silent, gray-haired man, paced the sidelines in front of his squad with eyes that saw little.

What chance now? With only a few minutes to play and two touch-downs against him, Dr. Walsh's career as State coach was hurrying to an end. His fifteen years of service, during several of which he had been a popular idol, his plans for his children, his appreciation of the public trust in him all were fading. In that vast throng of excited, howling people he had no friends. In this silent, smaller group behind him, huddled under their blankets, watching the field with their stolid, immobile faces, he had no friends. But wait!

His wrists chilled again as he felt those clammy hands upon them. Again, in a vivid flash, he looked into eyes eager and inspired. Dr. Walsh turned upon the squad. Quickly he found a face which had followed him throughout the game, not in hope, but merely in worship.

"Lambert!" he called.

Several of the squad looked up in surprise. Lambert's sole appearance previously had been for three minutes toward the end of a minor fray. The poet in moleskins started to warm up.

He was trembling when Walsh placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"Steady, lad," the coach said. "Tell Hartigan I said give you plays two, five and twelve through the left."

LAMBERT leaped upon the field, leaving at least four better halfbacks on the bench behind him. So the slighted halfbacks and the crowd, which yelled in exasperation,

felt. Far up on the east side of the stadium Jeanie Walsh half rose as she saw No. 85 rush on the field. She never had dreamed—

Neither had her father. Putting Lambert in, he now told himself, was merely a gesture to please his daughter, and the boy. Yet something out of that seemingly far-off successful past had spoken. But how truly? The ball had just come to State on its own forty-yard line. The players huddled, went into position. The ball was snapped. Then Dr. Walsh gave a low exclamation.

The play had gone off tackle on the left side where the great lineman Reynolds plunged. Reynolds made his usual smashing leap, but not fast enough to get out of the way of Ted Lambert who came through low and swiftly. The big tackle picked himself out of the pile with a dazed look. Nobody had hit him so hard from the back to-day. Walsh saw the hulking tackle draw the slightly-built sub halfback over to him and make some remark.

Lambert returned a grim nod. That first play had netted three yards. The next one went on the other side of the tackle and this time there was a difference. Behind him was some one to make a hole for. Reynolds went into the Bellevue substitutes, who now made up that part of the Bellevue line, and knocked them like ten-pins. And behind him, with a drive that electrified the great State following, came the slight, swift figure of Lambert.

"First down!" the cry swept the field. The linesmen fell over each other getting to a new position. Again the first play was repeated, and again the big tackle cleared a path. Two more plays and first down again. It was only when this had been repeated twice, with Lambert carrying the ball like a flying fiend at every play, that Bellevue managed to hold. State was well past the center of the field when forced to kick. A long, fine boot gave Bellevue the ball on her fifteen-yard line.

Here State held with a vigor not evi-

denced since the first half. Bellevue kicked and State rushed the ball back to the thirty-yard line. Coach Walsh looked at the time. Less than five minutes to play. Again the plays which gained ground for State were tried. Lambert through Reynolds's side of the line. The giant tackle did his best and the man behind him charged through with a spirit little short of madness. But they were held. Fourth down—four to go!

State was foiled. Its gaining streak seemed definitely stopped. The players went into a critical huddle. Then they sprang back into position.

"A kick!" the tens of thousands predicted.

But this time there had been less argument, more real counsel in the huddle. Reynolds was full of power and smash. Lambert was running like a madman. Why keep the pair smashing at a point which Bellevue had recognized and fortified?

So, an instant after the players took their positions, there was a line shift. Before Bellevue knew what had happened, an end run had started with Lambert carrying the ball, and the shifted Reynolds tearing along as nucleus of the interference.

Away they circled, Lambert protected before and behind. One—two—three men the giant Reynolds crushed to earth as they essayed tackles. Then, suddenly, he found himself between oncoming forces. A man to the left of him, a man to the right. They would pile him up and stop Lambert. Most runners, heading an interference, would have gone after the man in the most direct line with the goal. But, in a moment of inspiration, Reynolds went the other way.

He crashed into the man on his right. As they collided Lambert swept on through the gap. The man from the left now was very close. Lambert slackened to dodge. He seemed about to be tackled when, by a superhuman effort, Reynolds tore away from the

man he had sent spinning, and threw himself over the runner upon two men now coming up from the left. The trio went down, a fearful tangle of human bodies, and Lambert sped free.

Five yards—ten—fifteen. Then he fell beyond the line—scorer of a touchdown!

His name was on every lip as his toe "made it good."

But Reynolds was not in the line when the ball was kicked off. His herculean efforts and his last hard collision had finished him for the day. The crowd screamed as they went at it again. There were three minutes left.

BELLEVUE took no more chances. Veterans were returned to the line. New, fresh backs were put in with orders to score. The play shifted back and forth, and so another precious minute passed. Now Bellevue strengthened and pushed State back. Then State got her first real break of the day, repaying her for the loss of her star halfback so early in the game. As a Bellevue man was tackled hard behind the line the pigskin slipped from his fingers and wobbled into the hands of a second State tackler. By a fortunate start he reached Bellevue's thirty-five-yard line before being downed.

State supporters were screaming encouragement. But, with the little time left, it seemed hopeless, Lambert and the other backfield men had the battle of the game to make first down. Now the ball was twenty-five yards from Bellevue's line, and there was less than a minute to play.

They huddled. They jumped back into position. The ball was snapped. Hartigan, the quarter, fell back for a pass. It was to Lambert. Hemmed in by flying Bellevue men, he could not reach it. Incomplete. Hartigan again tried the line. Two yards. Futile! Thirty seconds to play. Dr. Walsh, whose heart had risen dizzily after Lambert's touchdown, now turned away. He looked back just in time to

see another attempt at forward pass. It was to the other halfback. A Bellevue player smashed it to the ground.

Twenty seconds left. Fourth down.

What play now for this desperate chance? The vast crowd leaned forward for a final thrill. Hartigan caught the ball, and retreated with it, ready to pass. Across a broken field swiftly ran a scarlet and gray man. But he was surrounded by men of blue and gold. Hartigan held the ball, not daring to throw it, while State supporters sent up a mighty groan.

Then by a series of dodges, miraculous in their speed, the man for whom the ball was intended slipped away and flew straight for the goal line. And Hartigan, taking the slim chance left, shot the ball with only a glimpse of the runner to guide him. It was a swift, accurate pass. The ball soared over the charging players straight toward the fleeing runner. But, alas for the runner's chances. Ted Lambert was hemmed about by two Bellevue players.

The poet in moleskins took a lone chance. High jumping had taught him how to get well off the earth, basketball had taught him when to jump. But it was the white heat of an inspiration which knows no failure that enabled Lambert to make a flying leap at the very peak of which he seized the ball. He doubled himself securely about it and fell to the ground behind the goal line for the second touchdown.

Kicking the goal seemed merely a perfunctory detail. The game was won by one point. Lambert had scored every point for his team.

WHEN pink sport extras flooded the home-going crowds and lame, tired players emerged in street dress into the base of the stadium tower, reporters besieged Ted Lambert for a statement.

The new football sensation smiled. "Why pick on me?" he asked. "The others made what I did possible, and

the coach will speak for us all. Winning, after all, is merely a detail in true sportsmanship, as losing is also. But if I was the means of winning the game it was because I believed in Dr. Walsh."

"Where is the coach?" said the spokesman reporter. "I want to ask him a question."

The coach entered at that moment, arm in arm with his radiant daughter. The reporter pushed toward him. "We just got a wire that you're offered fifteen thousand a year for five years to coach Eastern Tech," he said. "What about it, Dr. Walsh?"

"Representatives of the school called on me and proffered such a contract. But I told them to wait until after this game."

"You took a chance that—"

"I took a chance that the only community I love might again—"

Jack Spillman pushed through the crowd and interrupted: "Now, lissen, doc. I heard that last—and this community does trust you. We'll cover anything they offer, if I have to put up the difference myself. Damn it, doc, you stay here. Binus demands a man that can win games."

Dr. Walsh swallowed hard. Then he smiled at a queer figure before him. It was Tony Angelo, the caretaker, who grinned broadly.

"He's come to-day, docater. No. 5 of huskies to ween games. Hees name Fremont Walsh Angelo!"

"Congratulations, Tony. And what's this?" The coach indicated something green in Tony's hand.

"You no remember? Breeks when we lose, when we ween laurels. From my garden."

He clapped the green wreath on the coach's head.

"Here's where it belongs," said Walsh and shifted the laurel to the brow of Ted Lambert. "Binus, as Mr. Spillman calls it, be damned. But I'll stay next year to coach this young man for the All-American!"



"Do we close the bargain?" asked Chun Wah in a purring voice

The Pagan Ruby

Wily Chun Wah pits Oriental cleverness against the courage of Jack Eastman—with Jack's fiancée as a trump card

By J. ALLAN DUNN

Author of "Twenty-Stick Island," "The Voice in the Wilderness," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JACK EASTMAN, young stockbroker's clerk, is crossing Wall Street when a fleeing Chinaman, En Sue, bumps into him and whirls him into the arms of one of his two pursuers, a Lascar, who attempts to knife Eastman. The other, Mate Watter-son of the Penang, fatally wounds En Sue. All are taken to the station, and Eastman is put under five thousand dollars' bond as a material witness.

His employer, Holmquist, is jealous of Eastman's friendship with Holmquist's stenographer, Betty Bliss, and refuses to help; but Betty adds her sav-

ings to Jack's, and he gets out. That night he finds a huge ruby in his pocket where En Sue dropped it, and his lapidary friend, Denton, recognizes it as the ruby of Pagan, once held by Kublai Khan. Denton agrees to try to sell the gem to Yung Kwai, the Chinese ambassador. While Jack is in the building, three different times Chinamen attempt to enter his room.

The next day Betty and he hurry to put the jewel in a bank vault, to be released only to him with finger-print identification.

Chun Wah, wealthy and powerful

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smuggler, has learned that the ruby is in En Sue's hands, and guesses that Jack got it. He inspired the search of his room.

Meantime Tony Roth and his gang—one of whose hangers-on saw the gem change hands in Wall Street—have trailed Jack to the bank. They shadow him and Betty on a trip to Jack's former country home, where he plans a water power project with his newfound wealth, and seize the pair. Tying them up in the old mill, the gangsters threaten to blow them up unless Jack agrees to go with them to the bank, register his finger-prints, and surrender the ruby.

One of the gang is shot in a quarrel, and just as they light the fuse to the dynamite, they are frightened away by an approaching car. The dead gangster's blood extinguishes the fuse just before the rescuers come on the scene: a group of hard-bitten sailors, led, though Jack does not know it, by Wing, Chun Wah's lieutenant. Too late Jack realizes that the water they gave the fainting Betty and himself contains knock-out drops. Helplessly he drifts into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER X.

IN ORIENTAL HANDS.

IN several ways Chun Wah's campaign had been far better planned than that of Roth's gang, and yet it had gone awry.

There was the easy tracing of the two from Brooklyn by men far less conspicuous than the gangsters, and just as able. One of these men stood close to Jack while he talked with the garage proprietor. He was there ostensibly to ask the price of a rental car. And here the first slip was made. The existence of any one else on the trail of the ruby never occurred to either of the leaders or their subordinates.

The gangsters' car was no more conspicuous than any of the others that

joined the inevitable caravan of automobiles pouring out of the city. Chun Wah's nephew had eyes only for the car in which Jack sat with Betty. Strong arm methods were not pleasing or natural to his eastern subtlety, but he, too, wanted to get them out in the open and select his chance.

Before they got out of traffic jurisdiction a signal caught them and set them back several blocks before they could resume the chase. And then they did not close in with the car too nearly. Chun Wah's nephew sat beside the driver. A skillful make-up had deftly changed the distinctive Chinese pallor of his flesh, dark goggles with large lenses, such as are commonly used against sun glare, hid the obliquity of his eyes, a cap with a peak well pulled down covered the upper third of his face, and a linen duster over his neat suit completed the illusion that destroyed the stamp of his nationality.

The driver was as apt as Kelley. He knew intimately the first hundred miles of the route taken, with every byroad. He watched, as Kelley had done, from the tops of rises, hanging back on curves, and he looked for telltale dust to betray any swerving to a side road, the car rolling easily with plenty of reserve power.

The car had been readily procured. Eastman's friend was located in the district where there are several self-driving rental agencies. Once they passed Jack and Betty to make sure of their quarry, then dropped back again, content to let another car or two keep between them as long as they were not too widely apart.

Then, on a straight stretch that led to a twisting double curve where sign-boards said "Stop—Sharp Curves and Grades," a light sedan of a popular and comparatively cheap make came speeding past them and took the curve at thirty-five miles an hour, swinging out well to the middle of the highway as it negotiated the turn. Trees masked the curve and hid another similar car

coming down the hill, far too fast for the light machine, centrifugal action dragging it away from its proper right hand course.

There was the inevitable crash, the two cars sideswiping, careening, spinning, blocking the road. The driver of Chun Wah's car, cool in emergencies, made his calculations, set his brakes, then swung into the ditch to avoid collision.

His brakes released, his foot on the accelerator with the powerful thrust of his pistons and excellent judgment of space, he would have dodged around them and been away but for a rock, thrust by the winter storms from a stone wall, and fairly hidden by the long grass of the ditch.

The outcome was two light cars badly damaged, two cursing drivers blaming each other for the mishap, and a cooler driver surveying a smashed wheel.

MISFORTUNE having smitten them, relented somewhat. There was a town within a mile, a service garage that handled the agency for the same car. There was a second-hand one there for sale.

The driver surveyed its engine, tuned it up and refused it. Gold-paying currency bought a wheel and an hour saw them on their way again. There had been some tinkering to do besides the mere replacing of the wheel and now they had to show their skill as trackers.

Questions here and there kept them on the trail, and the first dirt road showed them the telltale tire marks. The driver-observer in the garage of Eastman's friend had noted all the treads of the car being prepared for Jack and Betty—two worn Goodriches in front, a Firestone and a Kelly-Springfield on the rears. Distinctive sign. Other tracks they did not consider, barely notice. They were making up time.

But Chun Wah's nephew did not

overlook the fact that the men who had left one of their dead comrades in the old mill with the fuse and the explosive had not come on foot.

Two men he commissioned turned his car while he swiftly evolved his scheme of knock-out drops and put it through. They found where the other car had parked and departed. They did not follow it. They strictly obeyed orders. For the two were not to be dealt with by the nephew, but by Chun Wah himself.

A Chinaman may use knife and gun and hatchet, but those matters are for henchmen, for subordinates who do not think.

Even as a rug merchant, selling his weaves, is bitterly disappointed if the customer fails to give him the exhilaration of long bargaining, as a chess player prefers the expert to the tyro for an opponent, so Chun Wah, direct enough in many of his affairs, according to circumstances, devised methods to secure the ruby of Pagan, beside which those of the frustrated Roth were clumsy.

That gang had started back to New York disgruntled, discomfited, intent only upon present escape. They were through with the ruby. One murder had been committed and others attempted. If they had known there was a Chinaman in that car that came to send them into a panic they might have rallied, but it was doubtful. Frosty was still insane from the drug. Kelley was not an executive. Roth was utterly broken down. The sight of Bull's bullet-smashed skull had nauseated mind as well as body. The whole gang were through.

EASTMAN stood before Chun Wah in the paneled room. He imagined it might be after night-fall, but he had lost count of time. There were concealed electric globes burning in Chinese designed fixtures, but then the room had no windows. He was conscious that he had been

drugged, of course, and the after-taste of the stuff was bitter in his mouth and his brain was dull as he tried to force it to normal functioning.

He had been well enough treated, though he was confined in a room with only a door that shut so closely it was hard to see it. He had awakened on a comfortable bunk and the moment he had come to, a Chinaman had appeared in the room, a man who was either a mute or considered it useless to use the one tongue he knew.

His questions about the girl remained unanswered. Food was brought him and with it a short note from Betty.

I am well and unharmed. This is all I am allowed to say.

"Somewhere in Chinatown," he concluded. That was the limit of his knowledge. Of course they were after the ruby, allied with the Chinese who had already tried to secure it.

Now he was in the presence of the master mind and he recognized the power, the wisdom, back of that too serene countenance.

"Let us take up this matter temperately," said Chun Wah. "Try to realize your situation. As for my own, it is well assured."

"You have taken me prisoner," said Eastman. "I am not here to answer questions."

"We shall see. Have you any to put to me? Concerning the young lady? I assure you she is quite safe."

His rendering of the final word was, to Jack, satirical. Yet he felt that she was unharmed. And if the price of her freedom was the ruby they could have it—after he was certain of her safety and sure that this bulky Chinaman with his air of assured authority was not bluffing. He could perhaps make a bargain. Save some part of the value of the gem.

Of one thing he was sure. This man would not, like Kelley, put him out of the way. Human life might mean lit-

tle to Chun Wah, men be the pawns in his own game, but what he wanted was the ruby. Jack stiffened himself.

He was not going to be escorted to the bank and a forced delivery. A Chinaman could not employ gangsters' methods of making a get-away. The disguise worn by the younger man who had come to the mill would be regarded with suspicion by the bank's detectives. Chinese could not mingle with a crowd, drive a car and lose themselves. He doubted very much whether they would try to kill him at the last moment, even if frustrated. Chun Wah's inscrutable eyes mocked him.

"I have no questions, at present," he said, his tongue furred and clumsy in his mouth. "Suppose you talk first."

"Excellent. It is a satisfaction to talk with one who can keep his head. With my assurance that the young lady is unhurt and that it is my sincere wish that she remains so, let us talk—of precious things."

"Of rubies?"

Chun Wah recapitulated, at length, in the long, slow Oriental way, perhaps for his own summing up, perhaps for the establishment of an inferiority complex in the mind of his captive. Eastman was amazed at his intimate knowledge of events, half dazed. Chun Wah loomed as a power. But he fought against the mastery. He had a vague idea that he had been used as a mere pawn.

"You see," said Chun Wah, "that I have sources of information. Let us discuss the ruby. You have it. I want it."

"It is in safe hands," said Jack.

"A matter of great satisfaction to me, I assure you," said Chun Wah. "I commend your cleverness. If the police had once got hold of it neither you nor I would have much interest in it now."

"You are a young man with your life ahead of you. Your ambitions are

still to be realized. There is love in your life. . None in mine. To you a woman is an incentive; to me, a play-thing.

"I suggest that to you that this girl whom I also hold, unscathed, is far more precious than the ruby. A scratch on its surface would distress me, to mar her body would to you be a sacrilege. You and I have varying conceptions of beauty. But she is yours. To youth, sex is the mistress magician. She controls all, in your scheme of things.

"You of the Occident have created a certain chivalry toward woman which has developed in your men a sense, an instinct of protectiveness. It is fostered by your women who are quick to see their advantage, and also by your churches and your bodies politic. The woman you love is a sacred object. More precious than rubies, as one of your psalmists said. Lao Tze and Confucius knew better. Let that slide. I will trade you the girl for the gem."

"You have taken a long time to state your bargain," said Eastman. "But do not forget that you are living in our civilization."

"We doubtless both consider each other barbarians. It is a matter of opinion—and of circumstance. Have you any idea where you are? I think not. Let it be sufficient that you are in my power—and so is the girl. Purely a matter of environment. Will you close the bargain? I will give you sureties."

"If I refuse?"

"Look."

A panel slid aside. Jack saw Betty in some Chinese garment of heavy white silk, seated in a chair, through an opening that was guarded by bars of steel. The lights had lowered in the room where he sat with Chun Wah. The outer room was brilliantly illuminated. Betty sat with wide-open eyes that seemed to see nothing. They were blank, her mind captured, as his had been.

On either side of her stood a sinister

figure in black Chinese garments, their yellow faces shining like masks covered with goldbeaters' skin. Each stood with folded hands over his middle, holding a great knife. The tableau was impressive, menacing.

"Do we close the bargain?" asked Chun Wah in a purring voice.

"You dare not harm her," said Eastman hoarsely.

"I have no synonym in my language for that word," said Chun Wah.

HE gave no audible order, made no apparent motion, but one of them reached out, gave a twitch to the white garment that fell about the girl's ivory shoulders. One rounded breast was shown, and to it the man set a knife. She showed no consciousness of it, but Eastman saw the blade depress the curving flesh, and he went mad.

He crouched, his bare hands clutching, set himself for the spring that would launch him for the obese Chun Wah, seated unmoved, his slitted eyes shining. His hands were hidden in his long brocaded, embroidered sleeves. They rested on the arms of the carved chair.

And as Jack poised for the leap a section of the floor slid noiselessly aside. It revealed a black gulf from which came the sound of running water. Jack recoiled. Chun Wah sat motionless.

The opening that had shown Betty closed and two others revealed themselves to the right and left. In them were gunmen, Chinese, holding poised pistols aimed at Eastman.

"Cold water on a hot plate of steel," said Chun Wah in a mocking singsong. "A puff of vapor—a hiss. So life goes out."

Eastman, crouching, gave his answer. The effects of the drug were gone. Betty's life was again at stake. He had been caught napping twice. No more, he was resolved. White brains against yellow—despite the odds.

"Harm her—or kill me—and you lose the ruby," he said.

"I have not overlooked the cards you hold," said Chun Wah. "As a whole, you hold a poor hand. Do not overbid it. As for your being killed, you must acknowledge that you were only threatened when you seemed about to attempt my life. You have been warned. As for the girl, I displayed her to you as a possible lead of mine—the queen of hearts. She was not conscious of anything. She is still under a drug."

The trap closed, the paneling slid into place. The gunmen vanished. Jack saw in a sudden flash what had eluded him hitherto, in a deadly seriousness of the moment. Chun Wah was enjoying himself, playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse. What a fool he had been to take Betty anywhere alone.

CHAPTER XI.

CHUN WAH'S SUBTLETY.

CHUN WAH knew nothing of Denton, of the trip to Washington, of the attempted sale to the ambassador. The gangsters he did not trouble about. His nephew had identified the body of Bull, leaving it there by the old mill, discreetly buried.

Chun knew the rest of that gang. He could get at the two addicts any time he wanted to, but since they had lost their bid for the ruby, they were not going to talk about it. They would lie low until they lifted another pay roll.

The ruby had come out of the sea through a dead man's hands to Eastman. Now it must come into Chun's. He knew where to dispose of it, to obtain the funds to bribe his way back into the good graces of the Chinese government—there were always means, venal officials in China—and then to carry out his revenge against his ancient enemy.

The plan he would evolve would be a delicious game for his middle age, devising vengeance in some gracious Chinese garden or on some carved gallery within the sound of lutes from the quarters of his women; far from Mott Street, which he hated with all his Oriental soul—a soul suppressed, denied communion while he made money.

Some day the great ruby would be sold in Europe. The customers for such a jewel were rare nowadays. Kings could no longer afford such luxuries. Too many crown jewels had been dispersed.

But some one would buy from the dealer from whom Chun knew he could get a great price. Perhaps some Latin-American grandee, enriched by pampas-fed cattle in the Argentine or it might even come back to America. He cared not. By that time he would be in Macao, the refuge of rich Chinese outlaws, negotiating for his return to the mainland.

It was a rare stroke of luck.

And the girl, as the play went, was to be his winning card. She was the high trump. He had seen the lover's anguish in Eastman's face before it turned to desperate rage.

"It would be a great pity to harm your lady," he went on smoothly. "A great pity. She has beauty. To maim that would distress me, yet it could be done skillfully and without killing. I have in my employ a man who is an expert in such matters. He is trained to them.

"Perhaps you have heard of the death of a thousand cuts? When the executioner is merciful or has been properly approached, he first gives the cuts of mercy. The eyes, the ears, the tongue, that one may not see nor hear nor shriek in agony that proclaims the coward. With a woman—"

But Eastman had leaped. The trap yawned but he had gauged it and his spring carried him beyond. Bullets crossed each other in deadly flight but missed him.

He landed and steadied for less than a pulse beat to take his second jump that would bring him within reach of the fat throat of the devil who taunted him. In mid-air something sprayed upon his face, a jet of methyl chloride squirted with unerring aim by Chun Wah from a rubber bulb and nozzle. The volatile soporific acted instantly and he fell insensible, to awaken once more in the room where he had first been lodged. The speechless Chinaman was watching him.

His agony of mind was supreme. He had failed again, and imperiled Betty. Even if he had strangled Chun Wah it would not have availed him. He could not fight his way to her unarmed. Even now they might be torturing her. The memory of that keen knife against her white breast sent him almost mad. The sinister Chinaman had no mercy. And Chinatown could hold its secrets.

He sprang up from the bunk and instantly his guard whipped out an automatic. They would take no more chances with him. That Chun Wah might be even now bluffing he hardly dared to hope. If Betty was out of her trance, even unharmed, what must be her state of mind! And there was her sister, helpless with the excitable Siska, useless in an emergency like this.

HOURS—or so it seemed—dragged by. His watch had run down and he did not rewind it, not knowing how to set it. A second guard relieved the first, bringing him food he could not touch, though he realized that it was wise for him to eat. The anæsthetic of the drug had passed, but his body was languid, and there was no strength in his arms or legs. His leap from the bunk left him exhausted.

There were no more messages of assurance from Betty. Somewhere in that warren she was immured, it might be many feet underground. Hideous images formed in his brain. They might send him some member of her dainty body in menace of what they

still might do—and he had provoked it.

They could have the ruby, but if they had harmed her—if he did not know that she was free, uninjured—he would not deliver the jewel. Yet if he did not, they might kill them both. These thoughts drove him to the very border line of frenzy. His lips were bitten, his palms showed the deep imprint of his nails, and a fever raged through him.

The door slid aside. Chun Wah stood in the entrance. Now he was clad in the blue serge and the soft black felt hat of commercial Chinatown. Without his robes he was somewhat less impressive, but his eyes, where so much of his vitality seemed stored, were those of the winning gambler.

"The bank will be open in a few minute," he said. "The vaults will be accessible. Are you ready to deliver the ruby?"

Eastman spoke through set teeth.

"What have you done with her, you yellow devil?" he demanded.

"Nothing—so far—oh, foreign devil," answered Chun Wah.

"Surely she is worth many rubies to you. You have youth. Riches might prove harmful to you. In all probability I do you a great service in removing them. It is better to work—for a young man. But the bank is opening and I am not disposed to waste any more time."

His voice changed in the last sentence. It was no longer purring. It was the snarl of a tiger.

"How do I know you will keep your end of the bargain?" asked Jack.

"That is simple. There is a highly respectable merchant on Fifth Avenue—Sing Fat—extremely honest and of great probity. I have had the fortune to do him certain favors and we Chinese always pay our debts. The girl will be taken to his store as a visitor, after she has given her word to say nothing of what has happened—as you will,

also. If you do not keep that word you will both pay the forfeit very promptly, I assure you.

"We will go there on our way back from the bank. You shall see her, and she shall be free to walk out with you—after you give me the ruby. You can hold it in your possession until that moment."

"You think I shall be fool enough to go into another Chinaman's store, to trust you—"

"My young friend, you have no other course. I am a patient man, but I am close to my limit. You shall meet the girl just inside, within full view of the Avenue. If that does not content you I very much fear the ruby of Pagan is doomed to stay indefinitely in the safety deposit, unless I can devise some other means of getting it—which is extremely doubtful.

"You also will be secure with your sweetheart. You may meet her in your Christian heaven, but your resurrection will be through hard layers of cement, I promise you. The wheel of Fortune has turned against you, yet you are no worse off than before this jewel was unexpectedly thrust upon you."

"You're nothing better than a damned thief," said Jack bitterly.

"And you a young fool who does not know when he is well off." Chun Wah's voice was like the grating of blades. "What right have you to this gem? Less than mine, since it was stolen from the Hanlin in Peking by looting *kwang tszes*. A jewel has many owners, but no masters. I pass it on to finish its destiny, after serving mine. You have held it for a moment, but such gems are not for stockbrokers' clerks. Have I your word?"

"After I know that she is safe."

CHUN shrugged his shoulders. "I give you my word. I do not give it lightly. The promise of a truthful man is a great asset. I do not lie. But you shall see her before we go. You are not very presentable,

but we can mend that. I will see that you make your toilet.

"And when you are at the bank I trust for her sake you will handle yourself properly. Sing Fat will not know why I bring the girl to his place, but he will ask no questions if I take her away again. And that will happen if you do not come out of the bank with the gem and bring it direct to the store.

"Love is a strong bond. You may find it so, later. You Occidentals make fools of yourselves over women. I would not trade that ruby for a thousand women. Follow me."

He led the way to a lavatory, the guard close behind Eastman, gun in hand. There were toilet articles there and he was left to himself for a short time while he washed, brushed off his clothes and arranged his tie. Chun Wah had suggested shaving and he did this also. In the glass he saw himself—pale, hollow-eyed; and he tried to pull himself together. He had lost the ruby, but he must not lose Betty.

A guard took him back to the paneled room where Chun waited for him. Chun poured from a crystal bottle an amber fluid, filling two small glasses. An aroma stole out from the liquor.

"This," said Chun Wah, "will make a new man of you. I am not in the habit of drinking at this hour, but I do so to show good faith. You may choose which glass you please. There is no trickery here. The hands are played, we now collect the stakes. And you need it."

"You promised you would show her to me?"

"So impatient? Turn around."

Betty stood behind slender bars of steel. She called to him and he ran to where she was caged.

"You are safe? They haven't harmed you?"

"No. You, Jack?"

"I'm all right—now I know that you are. We've lost the ruby."

"I know. What does that matter? We've got each other."

She smiled at him, a little wanly.

"We'll be good losers, Jack—and I'll try to make it up to you."

There was a promise in her eyes that made Jack forget his chagrin. The future he had visioned for her had vanished, but there was no doubt of their happiness, good fortune or ill, since it would be shared. What a good sport she was! Now he saw a Chinese woman coming forward and the sight was reassuring. The knifemen, with their callous indecency, had been dismissed. Chun Wah, according to his strange lights, was playing fair.

"They say I'm going to be free in a little while, with you, if I promise to say nothing. I'm afraid I've got to go now, but Jack, will you ask him to let Clara know that I am all right. She is sensible and she will keep still after she understands, but now she must be frantic."

"I'll do it," said Jack. Chun could hardly refuse him that. A panel slid softly and slowly across the bars and she was gone.

"You see, my young friend," said the voice of Chun Wah, purring again now, "that I have treated you very well. You may telephone from here to her sister, in my presence. Now, take your cordial. And try and appreciate it. You will never have another drink like that."

FOR a moment Eastman paused, suspecting a double meaning. But Chun Wah dared not harm him. He had gained his point—and the ruby. That gem had lost its significance to Jack. He and Betty would work their way together.

"To love! If there is such a thing, may you possess it in full measure," said Chun, lifting his glass, inhaling the aroma, sipping delicately.

The first drops sent a rare surge of strength through Jack. The subtle qualities of the liqueur, distilled from rare fruits and herbs, invigorated him, sent the blood in a strong tide through

his veins, banished all weariness, left him curiously optimistic.

The importance of the ruby dwindled still more. He would carry out his original plans, take the bail money—the fact of the trial came back to him and the thought that they might be looking for him in the district attorney's office now—study his course, perfect his plans, raise the capital, put through the scheme, after all. He could get options on the land.

Chun Wah watched him quizzically, the flicker of a smile in his eyes.

"It is like magic? So. We will go. First I must have the formality of your word that you will do nothing that will prevent the consummation of your bargain, whatever may or may not happen. Then you may use the telephone and we will start for the bank."

"I give you my word," Eastman told him. A faint thought of Denton came to him, a wonder whether he had returned. But Denton could not help him, even if he could communicate with him. His was not the caliber for startling rescues. And he had given his word to deliver the ruby, in exchange for the gift of Betty.

The telephone had no number label. Chun stood by while he gave his brief message. He heard Siska gasp as he gave his name. Then there was a wait: Clara was being wheeled to the phone. Then came her voice, sharp with apprehension.

"Mr. Eastman? Where is Betty?"

"She'll be home inside of two hours."

Chun touched him on the arm, and he hung up. It was just as well, perhaps. Clara's voice suggested wrath. And they would never be able to explain to her what had happened.

There was a sedan outside, well appointed, with an American chauffeur. They sped to Broadway, on to Fifth Avenue.

It seemed to Jack as if he had just awakened from a nightmare. The

sight of the busy streets and hurrying crowds, intent on their own business, the sun and shadow on the tall buildings, the press of the traffic, the signal lights and pedestrians held up at street crossings—these made the scenes he had passed through seem unreal. Even now he seemed apart from his fellow men, though he was soon to be one of them again.

The car stopped at a store whose windows were set with a display of one or two rare pieces of jade, or porcelain, of carving, backed by exquisite brocades. The sign above the glass read: "Sing Fat, Importer."

"I shall wait for you here," said Chun Wah. "I have every confidence in you, Mr. Eastman. I am sure you will keep your word in all respects—as I will mine."

There was warning in the manner of his speech, and Eastman noted it. If he did not come back with the ruby he would not find Betty. He might make an outcry, but he did not doubt that Chun Wah was prepared for that. He had not forgotten the spray that had robbed him of his senses in a second.

"I should be pleased if you would meet Sing Fat," said Chun Wah. "You will find him a very pleasant gentleman."

They got out of the car and entered the store, a great room that was partitioned off toward the back, with carved teak overlaying the partitions. There was a faint suggestion of sandalwood. Here were veritable objects of Oriental art, no catch-dollar bazaar. A clerk came quietly forward, deferential, polite, sleek as a new-licked cat.

Chun Wah spoke to him in Chinese. Here, Jack realized, was a weapon that might be used against him. He glanced about him while the clerk padded back. The windows were shut off from the street by the brocades. He determined to deliver the gem in the doorway, with Betty beside him.

A man came forward who was

dressed in Chinese garments of heavy silk. His face was like an ivory carving in which eyes of liquid jet had been inset. He had the air of an aristocrat, and there was a filigree casing of delicately designed silver on the forefinger of his right hand. His bow was perfect, and his English, in acknowledging the introduction, was almost as good as that of Chun Wah.

"A friend of mine, Mr. Eastman," said Chun Wah. "We are expecting a young lady presently, the *fiancée* of my friend. It is my desire to give them a wedding present which I trust she will choose, with your assistance, though I am convinced of her own good taste. Something that will insure them good luck, Sing Fat."

Eastman could not but admire the sheer audacity of Chun. The man was a rascal, but he had his parts. To offer them a gift! It was, in a way, superb insolence. But he decided to be a good sport.

"Not too valuable," he said. "Riches are not a wise choice for youth."

For the first time he saw Chun Wah smile. His face was actually benevolent.

"You must let me be the judge of that," he answered. "Mr. Eastman has business uptown. I shall await his *fiancée*." He walked to the door with Jack.

"This is where the delivery will be made," said Eastman. "Here, by the door."

"Let us no longer be suspicious of each other," countered Chun. "'Lie not, but be truthful,' said Buddha the Enlightened when he spake of the Ten Evils. Rejoice at the welfare of others. Cherish no hatred, not even against your enemies. Speak to a purpose or remain silent. Also, pity those who are burdened with riches. Be not envious. Not by hatred is hatred appeased."

"So—you are a good sport, Mr. Eastman. I hope to see you inside of half an hour."

Eastman went out wondering, as many others have, just what complexes make up a Chinaman.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUBY CHANGES HANDS.

A POLICEMAN was arguing with the chauffeur, denying him longer parking rights. Jack stood in the doorway for an instant, delayed by passers-by. Then he saw Denton.

For an instant, with a leap of his heart, he thought to hail him. Then the lapidary came opposite him. He was not alone. Two men were with him, clean-shaven, quiet faced persons with an air of efficiency. They moved among the crowd as if bent on some purpose of their own that ignored the busy shoppers and window gazers. What if he called to Denton, enlisted the aid of these men who were so curiously, unobtrusively aloof from the crowd? They walked as if they escorted Denton, almost as if they protected him.

And at that moment the lapidary turned and saw him, halted. But Eastman shook his head at him slightly and walked across the sidewalk to the car. He had given his word. Chun Wah was still in the doorway.

He felt Denton's astounded look, but paid no attention to it. The chauffeur had seen him, pacified the officer by the statement that he was moving immediately and then Eastman was in the car, seated on the luxurious cushions, moving up the Avenue toward the bank, sworn to deliver the ruby.

He had a curious sensation that if he had spoken to Denton and the men with him he might have done wisely. But at the cost of his word. If Betty had already arrived at Sing Fat's he might have wavered. There was something about Denton's companions that had impressed him—a vague feeling that they bore authority, were men used to emergencies.

But his bargain was made, his honor involved. Betty had pledged hers, too, so that they two might belong to each other. He knew by now the clear, clean flame of her spirit. She would despise him if he falsified himself, even to secure her liberty. She believed in him.

They arrived at the bank at last and he went in. The vigor of the liqueur that Chun had given him, or perhaps the elation of being clear of that Chinatown bastille, was strong within him. They had emerged on Mott Street through a restaurant reached by devious ways, past many heavy doors, up and down stairs, confusing, obliterating any conception of where he had been held.

But he was free now and he went into the bank almost jauntily, going through the formalities and, at last, gaining possession of the little box that held a fortune—no longer his—the ruby of Pagan, the gem of Kublai Khan.

He did not look at it, as there was no question of its not being there and he did not want to see it again. It had come into his life and it had brought him Betty. That was enough. After all, it had proved a talisman.

He thrust it into an inside pocket and returned to the waiting car, this time parked on a side street. The chauffeur, he fancied, looked at him as if he had some inkling that he carried something of more than ordinary value.

Then they rolled smoothly back to Sing Fat's, halting on signal, moving on again, nearer and nearer to the passing over of a fortune—and the acquisition of Betty. That was what really counted. The possession of the ruby had been a great adventure, they had seen life and death in a swiftly moving panorama, they had dreamed dreams—and now they were back to reality, to happiness.

It would be an uphill road that money would have smoothed. It would

not have harmed them, but that aid was gone. Still, the future seemed bright enough to Jack, the ruby little more than a colored pebble.

The chauffeur swung round the block on a one-way street so that he could fetch up to the curb outside the store. Jack got out and entered. The padding clerk came forward again, sibilating his name.

"Misty Eas'man? Lady in back loom with Sing Fat an'—gen'l'man you come with."

"Please tell them that I'm here, will you?"

HE did not seriously suspect Chun Wah of more chicanery, despite all that he had gone through, but he was taking no chances. The clerk went padding back again. Two more, talking in low tones at the back, glanced at him and went on with their conversation. Outside the steady stream of people passed, few glancing in.

A man entered—Chinese—dressed meticulously, correct from hat to gloves and spats and cane, wearing them with the air of usage. There was a note of breeding about him, a hint of arrogance that made Jack look twice at him, impatient as he was for Betty to appear, to close the one-sided bargain he had been forced to make.

The clerks stopped talking. One of them came forward. The newcomer addressed him in his own tongue, and the clerk shot a swift glance at him. It seemed a mixture of fear and reverence. He said something and the reply came back, staccato, imperative.

The clerk started to show the customer some jade ornaments representing shrubbery and flowers in which the more precious stone was skillfully intermingled with others less rare, jasper, onyx, carnelian and chalcedony. His manner was subservient, and now and then he looked toward the back of the store anxiously, only to be recalled to attention by the other.

At another time Eastman might have been intrigued by this, wondered what it meant. Now he was too anxious.

A door opened in the rear, and Sing Fat appeared, holding it open for Betty. Behind her came Chun Wah, a parcel in his hand. He looked sharply about him and seemed annoyed at the presence of the customer who stood with turned back, critically examining the ornaments.

The three came on, Sing Fat halting midway to speak with a clerk. Eastman remained in the doorway, though he thought Betty looked a little as if she wondered why he did not go to meet her.

"You have it?" asked Chun Wah.

For answer Eastman took out the little box from his pocket and handed it over. Chun Wah's sallow face seemed to flush a little as he opened it. Certainly his eyes gleamed as though they reflected the red fire of the great ruby. He did not take it from its case, but held the latter in his cupped hand while he gazed at it.

"You have kept your word," he said. "I keep mine, with this for souvenir." He put away the ruby and held out the parcel. Jack hesitated. He wanted to be a good sport, but this seemed rubbing it in. All he desired was to be outside with Betty, to get a taxi, to get to the subway, to be off for Brooklyn, to get her to himself, after they had appeased Clara.

Chun Wah had to move aside a little as the door swung open again. Here were the two men Jack had seen with Denton, and one of them gave Eastman a warning glance as he passed on and the other unnecessarily closed the door, which had its own patent pneumatic arrangement.

To Jack the atmosphere had suddenly become tense. He saw that the Chinaman who had been looking at the artificial flowers had come forward to join the man who had passed him. The second man still fiddled with the door.

Jack still had not taken the parcel

which contained the gift that Chun proposed. And Chun, save that he seemed annoyed at intrusion, was unperturbed. He put the parcel on a show case.

THAT is Chun Wah." The voice of the supposed customer sounded sharp and clear, like a sudden note on a bugle.

Jack saw Chun's eyes suddenly widen, for all their oblique, narrow lids. Action broke out. The man in the doorway brought out a gun in a lightning move from a breast holster. There was another in the hand of the second.

"Don't make a move, Chun," said the one nearest him. "Wouldn't even blink if I were you. You're too tricky. I know you, but we wanted Mr. Fu to identify you."

"Fu?" Chun seemed flustered out of his poise.

"Secretary of the Chinese Embassy in Washington. We've wanted you for a long time, Chun, and now we've got you, though I'm afraid we will have to turn you over. Looks as if you'd be deported, and Mr. Fu tells me they will take proper care of you on the other side.

"That suits us. We don't want white slavers and opium runners in this country, to say nothing of dope peddling."

"This is an outrage," said Chun.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it was," answered the officer. "It usually is, one way or another. I've got my orders." He used his free hand to turn up the bottom of his vest and showed the small badge of the Federal service.

"We've got a pretty good idea of what you've been up to, Chun, here in New York and along the borders, though we've never been able to pin the bee on you before. I have a hunch Mr. Fu can help us to do that if it's necessary. But I don't think it is.

"Looks to me as if this was going to be handled confidentially by the Foreign Office instead of through the Sec-

retary of the Interior. Anyway, don't try any funny business or we'll drill you. You needn't put your hands up. This isn't an exhibition arrest."

Chun turned baleful eyes on Eastman.

"I had nothing to do with this," said Jack.

Nor had he, though it was through his previously seeing Denton that this had come about. He wondered where the lapidary was and marveled how the ambassador had managed to act in such prompt fashion. How had they tied up Chun in the matter?

Chun turned a suddenly haggard gaze to the secretary, then broke into a torrent of Chinese. The other answered him abruptly, severely, in the mode of a judge imposing sentence.

"He wants to give me something," Fu told the officers.

"All right. Move slow, Chun. The first break we get you."

Chun looked at the officer with a malicious contempt at which the man grinned cheerfully.

None there, save perhaps Fu, and that was doubtful, knew anything of the enmity Chun held against the man who had once more worsted him. How the ambassador came to be mixed up in this matter was incomprehensible to Chun. His omniscience had been dissolved. His spirit was broken.

He knew what this meant. He was to be sent back to China as a favor between governments, peremptorily extradited. There'd be no chance to bribe officials. He was already condemned.

The new China might be a republic, but that was not going to help in this affair. Methods of punishment were still swift and arbitrary. He had no standing in the United States. Under pressure from the embassy plenty of his own countrymen who had been in his employ or associated with him would tell all they knew—and more. But the ruby was the real, red heart of the matter. Because of that he was to be turned over.

He had played good cards for high stakes—and there had been a joker in the deck after all.

VERY slowly he thrust his hand into the pocket where he had placed the jewel when the two last comers entered. A sort of paralysis seemed to affect him as his fingers fumbled for a moment before they were withdrawn, holding the box.

He opened it, and in the dusk of that dignified store with its subdued lighting, while Sing Fat and his clerks looked on warily, it seemed to Eastman as if stored up rays were suddenly released in a stabbing flare of crimson.

The great jewel lay palpitating like something surely alive, beautiful beyond belief.

One officer whistled softly, the other gave a little gasp. Fu seemed unmoved, but Betty's "Oh" of delight was almost startling. And once again Jack felt the strange influence that emanated from the crystal. It had been his talisman, Chun's Nemesis.

Holding it in both hands, fingers and thumbs upcurved, Chun Wah sank his head down toward the gem in a gesture of worship.

Just as it was about to touch his forehead his movement became rapid. One officer gave a warning cry and sprang forward as the box fell and the ruby of Pagan struck the floor, bounced in a whirl of flame, rolled in a disk of crimson glory and stopped just after it crossed the edge of a Chinese rug, where it lay glowing on the dark background.

Fu retrieved it. The rest stood temporarily transfixed as Chun Wah toppled and fell, his face striking the planks like a dropped pumpkin, his great body quivering, convulsed for a hideous moment, then utterly still. The once placid features were twisted in a snarl of defiance. The officers turned him over. Betty had her head hidden on her lover's shoulder.

"Might have guessed he'd do something like that," said one of the officers. "I reckon he knew what he was doing. Preferred poison to deportation. Knew what would be waiting for him. Held the stuff between the edges of his hands and fooled us with that fake kowtow. We'll have to park him in the back of the store until we can take him away later on. Don't want this to be made public. Mr. Fu, will you speak to Sing Fat?"

Fu spoke authoritatively and Sing Fat ordered his clerks to an unwelcome task that they dared not refuse. It was clear that the powers vested in Fu were not to be despised, even though this was Manhattan instead of Peking. Sing Fat helping, they carried the gross body back and disappeared with it inside the private quarters.

"We'll get a basket up here and have him taken to the morgue after dark, when the shopping district is clear," said the officer. "Sing Fat can close his store for the rest of the day if he wants to, put up some excuse on the door, or he can carry on. It can't be helped. Serves him right for getting mixed up in any way with Chun, though he holds a clean record himself.

"I'll see the coroner and the district attorney. The matter won't go any further. I'm sorry we couldn't go through with it for you, Mr. Fu."

There was the mere flicker of a smile on the secretary's impassive face.

"The deportation has been quite successful," he said. "And more than one main object has been attained."

"I'll have to make my report, of course," went on the officer. "I imagine that Chun Wah obtained possession of that ruby from you by force or trickery?" he asked Eastman.

EASTMAN hesitated. He considered himself absolved from the promise which had been specifically made to keep Chun Wah free of jeopardy. He was beyond that now, in this world. The ruby was in the

possession of the secretary to the ambassador of the country that originally owned it.

He did not know how far that ownership would be sustained by the United States government. He was hazy as to the laws regarding loot or treasure trove, if his own holding of the gem could be covered by either of those terms. But, considering the authority unleashed on behalf of the embassy, he considered it probable that the foreign department would sustain Yung Kwai.

He did not want any publicity either before or after the trial, not merely for his own sake, but to avoid having Betty dragged into an unenviable newspaper notoriety. He could well imagine what the press would make of it.

"It will go no farther," said the secret service man as Jack hesitated. "This is an entirely confidential matter. Perhaps Mr. Fu will explain a little how we happened to be after Chun on his account. Mr. Denton was very tired with his efforts in the last forty-eight hours.

"We sent him to his room. He is not overly strong, and he has gone through a lot of excitement. His eyes are none too good yet, under stimulus, he recognized you when you left here about an hour ago and that gave us the clew we were looking for. But whatever you choose to tell us will go into secret archives.

"This is not a civic or state affair. It is being handled by the foreign department. We are going to have a little talk with Chun's chauffeur, and we will take a little trip to Mott Street. With Chun dead, his organization ends automatically, but that end of it will be taken up separately. It needn't involve you or the young lady."

"You see," said Fu, "Mr. Denton came to the ambassador with word of this ruby, once possessed by my country. Its history was well known to him. He has, of course, seen the gem when it was kept in the Hanlin, the

buildings of which were wrecked when Peking was taken by the allies during the unfortunate windup of the Boxer troubles. I myself have seen it there, prior to nineteen hundred. I am older than you perhaps imagine," he added with a bow to Eastman and Betty.

"I suggest," he went on, "that we find seats at the back of the store for awhile, where we shall be undisturbed. Sing Fat will, I am sure, be agreeable."

There was a hint of the steel gauntlet under the velvet glove as he said this, raising his voice so that Sing Fat would hear, then speaking rapidly to the latter in Chinese.

Sing Fat kowtowed, his poise lost, arranging chairs for them. One of the secret service men went to the telephone to summon a subordinate to stay in the store until the body was removed. Sing Fat, it appeared, preferred to keep the store open.

"We know Mr. Denton well," Fu continued. "We have every confidence in his knowledge. From his description there appeared small doubt that this was the ruby of Kublai Khan. The ambassador was willing to purchase it, with the intention of some day restoring it to our own government, when, perhaps, it becomes more stable.

"A price was mentioned that was satisfactory. The question of price did not enter into the ambassador's motives for wishing to obtain the gem. He is very wealthy, even as wealth goes in America. But he thought it well that I should return to New York with Mr. Denton to further identify the ruby and to close the negotiations.

"When we arrived, Mr. Denton discovered that you were absent from the address you gave him. From there he obtained another address—that of Miss Bliss, I believe. And he found her sister in much perturbation over the prolonged absence of both of you. She was convinced that Miss Bliss would not leave her overnight in her sick and nervous condition unless something serious had happened.

"Being an invalid with a servant who is not over intelligent on such matters, she was much upset. Mr. Denton persuaded her not to communicate with the police, which she was on the point of doing, assuring her that he could obtain more expert services.

"THE gem, we knew, was in keeping at the bank, an excellent precaution. Mr. Denton got into instant communication with me and I was fortunate enough, through communication with Washington, immediately to get the aid of the Secret Service by using the ambassador's name. Mr. Edwards, of the Secret Service, flew here by airplane where Mr. Estey was already under orders to meet him. We have been busy since.

"We had no clues as yet, save the bank. Ultimately, it seemed certain that you would come there and Mr. Estey ascertained yesterday afternoon that no one but yourself could possibly retrieve the ruby. We have had men there waiting your arrival.

"When Mr. Denton saw you leaving this store, he was on his way there with these gentlemen to meet me. Your attitude, on top of your disappearance, set them on the alert. Estey entered the store and, when he saw Chun, knowing his reputation in official circles, he was sure that we were on the trail at last.

"We know something of Chun at the Embassy. We have kept in touch with him very easily, though it was not our province to go into any illicit undertakings he might be concerned in with this country, save in the matter of smuggling Chinese. On that point we were eager to coöperate with your government and there was on foot an investigation of our own that before long would have been reported to your officials.

"I think that Chun would very soon have found himself in trouble anyway. It was our purpose in that event to ask for his deportation under guard. There

are, or rather there were, matters for which we desired his presence on the other side.

"I came with them back to the store to complete Chun's identification. His recognition of me was sufficient to assure him that his activities were over. He made a futile attempt, when he spoke with me, to secure some immunity by delivery of the ruby. That could not be permitted. He chose a way out that he must have kept open for such an emergency. He was a man of foresight.

"Whatever you care to say to Estey and Edwards they have already told you will be inviolate, not a matter of public record. Let me add to this my assurance. You may aid materially in stamping out Chun's evil organization.

"For myself, my purpose was to secure the ruby, if it was indeed the gem of Kublai Khan. There is no doubt of that," he added. "There has been found but one such jewel. I doubt if its equal will ever be unearthed. That I have been able to help in disposing of Chun is a stroke of good fortune that the ambassador will appreciate. And I am sure that he, with me, will lament that Miss Bliss and yourself have been put to any trouble by this malefactor."

He bowed, calm, collected, eminently courteous. Eastman returned the bow. He had lost the ruby, but he had Betty. Chun was dead.

"I shall return to Washington," said Fu, "as soon as I have talked again with Mr. Denton. He is, I understand your broker in this matter. I should suggest that you return the jewel to the safety deposit until it more legitimately passes into our hands."

With a gesture that was as magnificent as it was simple he handed the gem in its box to the astonished Eastman.

"You mean," he almost gasped, "that you still consider me the owner of this?" Fu bowed again.

"Beyond a doubt," he said. "The

ambassador could not think otherwise. The question of monetary exchange is, as I have said, of no moment to him. It is but just that you should have compensation. I am delighted to have aided in its restoration."

There was a touch of haughtiness in his manner, not of superciliousness, but rather of the nobleman who instinctively resented slightly that his code should not have been better understood.

"MR. DENTON has assured me of your good faith in the ownership," Fu added. "We are convinced of his, and, now that I have the honor of meeting you and Miss Bliss, of yours. I should esteem it a courtesy if you would furnish me with the history of your coming into possession of it.

"Confidentially and privately, of course. It is the custom in any dealing with gems of any value and magnitude to acquaint the purchaser with its history, as far as known to the one who sells. I am myself, in a minor way, a connoisseur of precious stones. It was a part of my education.

"So that you may accept my statement, which Mr. Denton will indorse, perhaps you will favor me by furnishing a written statement which will be quite sufficient. I can imagine that you have urgent private affairs and my own are pressing for the moment. I am anxious to communicate with the Embassy.

"You will hear from me through Mr. Denton very shortly and I shall personally return later with the purchase price and take over the ruby. You may feel that the sale is made, Mr. Eastman, and I trust that good fortune will attend your enterprises, of which Mr. Denton has made me somewhat acquainted.

"You know where to find me," he concluded to the Secret Service men. "I thank you for your coöperation. You will hear more of that matter from the Embassy."

Again he bowed and, turning once more to Sing Fat, spoke a few crisp sentences that brought drops of sweat to the merchant's ivory forehead, though he seemed relieved enough at the way the affair closed. Eastman fancied he had been given a judicious warning against careless associations. To an exporter from China the goodwill of the Embassy was a paramount necessity.

"Now," said Estey, "before you take Miss Bliss home, suppose you tell us about your experience with Chun. It is optional with you, of course, but it would be valuable to us."

Eastman had made up his mind what to tell and what to leave out. He began at the old mill, shrewdly calculating that the young Chinaman would have erased traces that might or might not be later connected with Chun. He was efficient, that nephew of the dead man. Therefore he did not mention the gangsters, but told of their own purpose in going there and of their kidnaping by Chun's emissaries. From then on he omitted nothing.

"Much obliged to you," said Estey. "Edwards and myself will go to the bank with you. We'll commandeer Chun's car. There is a man of ours watching it. Then you can take home the young lady. And we wish you luck. Looks as if you had it."

He grinned, without offense, and they all shook hands. The door opened and an operative entered and came up to them. He looked like an ordinary clerk, a little bald and a little shabby, not in the least like a Secret Service employee. He was to stay in the store until the removal of Chun's body.

Sing Fat bowed them to the door. There he handed Eastman the parcel that Chun had offered him.

"He chose it himself. The lady would not," he said. "It is of value. Look."

Eastman was not in the least minded to accept it, any more than Betty had been to choose a gift from such a

source. But Sing Fat swiftly stripped off the covering and showed the sandal wood box that held it. It was an exquisite case of pale green jade, designed perhaps to hold bijouterie, to preserve as a bibelot; too rare for ordinary use.

On it was carved, so that the design was raised, a curious ideograph.

"The jade is *fei-ts-ui*," said Sing Fat glibly. "It is very precious and comes from Kara-Dash in Eastern Turkestan. And this"—he traced with his incased forefinger the outline of the ideograph—"brings good fortune, a charm for good luck."

"I'm afraid it might work the other way," said Jack. "How about it, Betty? Do you want it?"

She shook her head with a little shiver.

"That settles it," said Eastman. "No, thanks."

"Hold on a minute," said Estey. "Chun paid you for this, Sing Fat?"

"Yes."

"Then why make Sing Fat a present of it?"

"You are quite right," said Jack. "You are married, Mr. Estey?"

"Twelve years."

"Then do me the favor to accept this. Mr. Edwards, I am sorry there are not two of these. At the present moment I am not overly wealthy. What cash I have is tied up," he added with an inward grin at the thought of the bail money. "There was also the car to be retrieved or paid for."

"But it looks as if I were going to be a rich man. I do not mention money to insult either of you, but you have rendered me a great service and, if it is not against the rules of your profession to accept a slight recognition, I hope that Mr. Estey will take this and that you will accept something else from me later."

The men looked at each other and at the smiling Betty.

"We do occasionally get something of the sort," said Estey. "There's no

rule against our wives accepting presents so long as we approve. It's mighty decent of you. Is there anything else we can do for you?"

"Help me to get back the car I hired."

"That's easy. Tell us where to deliver it. We'll let Chun's chauffeur attend to that."

THERE was no mention of the ruby of Pagan at the trial for the killing of En Sue. The district attorney did not have to produce a motive; the killing was done in the broad light of day and the prisoners were not heroic figures. The trial went through swiftly to its appointed end and Jack's testimony was but a perfunctory part in the evidence that led to the inevitable verdict of guilty.

It was the second day after the trial when Denton came over to Brooklyn in the afternoon. It was not the first time that he had visited the Bliss home. He was a favorite with Clara who now, in possession of the facts and reasons why Betty and Jack had been away and had not communicated with her, had quite forgiven them.

"There is only one thing I insist upon," she said, "and that is a home wedding. I have to be bridesmaid and I refuse absolutely to act in that capacity after being wheeled down the aisle of a church in my chair."

After the manner of sisters, she spoke of the engagement before it actually existed. Betty blushed and Jack felt like an idiot, but rose sufficiently to the occasion to observe that he sanctioned her suggestion. Betty left the room with her blush still burning and Clara looked at Jack.

"You're a nice man and you'll make a ducky brother-in-law," she said, "but you're an awful sap. Betty's human."

Denton brought stirring news.

Fu was in New York again. There was a certified check in the bank waiting for the transfer of the ruby to Fu. Two hundred thousand dollars.

Betty gasped. It seemed a fortune to her. To Jack not so vast a sum. Put into the work of his dam, reservoir and power-house, it was probably less than a twentieth of what the final cost would be. But it meant surveys, rock borings, the option on the land once its purchase was decided upon, expert opinion that would command the needed capital while the options would hold for Jack his control.

Fifty thousand would probably cover all that, he considered. The options, even the actual purchase of that idle land, would not amount to much more than twenty thousand. There was twenty thousand to go to Denton, over his protest and attempted insistence on five per cent instead of ten.

There was a home to be bought, a home with a rose garden—for Betty and himself. There was money to be squandered upon her so far as she would allow him—and there was ten thousand to be set aside to take Clara to the German doctor who would make her well again.

All these things he set before Betty the night after Denton had told them of the check. She reproved him for any intended extravagances lavished upon herself and thrilled at the same time, thinking of them—his gifts. And

she demurred for a moment about Clara.

"It is wonderful of you, Jack, dear."

"Say, Jack, darling."

"I will not." As a matter of fact she did not, but then her lips were otherwise employed and Jack was satisfied with the substitution.

"Clara may not like to take money from you. It means everything to her, but it might not be a success."

"Nonsense. The ruby is a family talisman, or was. It brought me you, and Clara with you."

There was another lapse.

"But I could not let her go abroad alone, just with nurses. I must be with her when the operation is performed—afterward."

"What of it? It won't take very long to get the preliminary work done on surveys and options—then the expert can draw up his report and earn his ten thousand dollars while we take Clara along with us to Europe—on our honeymoon."

"Jack, you are a darling. Not many men would take along a third on that sort of a trip."

"I'm mighty fond of Clara, Betty, but I'm willing to wager that on this occasion I won't even know she's with us."

THE END

Brazil's Diamond Rush

A RECENT dispatch from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, tells of a rush for new diamond fields discovered up the Araguaya River. Five thousand men, of all nationalities, are camped along the river, in wild Matto Grosso state, waiting for low water before beginning the long journey.

Strong currents make it impossible to navigate the river except in the driest part of the year, and even then it is a dangerous undertaking. The trip into the interior requires three weeks of traveling and necessitates the use of canoes, mules, and walking.

Already a mushroom town has sprung up in the almost unknown region known as La Geado. The place has all the characteristics of a Wild West mining camp. Dance halls, cabarets, saloons, and gambling dens are running full blast twenty-four hours a day. The whole camp is filled with wild hopes and dreams that the new find will rival the well-known Kimberley fields.

Guy Rader.

Code of the Mounted

By FLORIA HOWE BRUESS

An amazing man-hunt in Arctic snows—and how Sergeant Hardy and Keith Morely played the game, each according to his own strict code



Long and steadily he stared at the uniform—his own, of course!

"HALT!" The curt command cut through the frost-bound silence. The Northern mail-driver froze in his tracks.

He shot a glance at his companion, Sergeant Hardy, and saw the officer had whipped his .45 Colt from its holster.

"Quick on the draw, aren't you? But I've got you both covered. Put that gun back in your holster before I count three, or this load of shot will blow your head off."

The voice came from above. Intently the two men on the narrow defile below scanned the overhanging snow-covered rocks, but no form was visible.

"One—" The relentless voice had begun to count.

"Two—"

Grimly Sergeant Hardy slipped his gun in its holster. "The winner of the opening hand does not always win the game," he thought, dispassionately.

"I want the mail bag," the unseen speaker went on. "Put the bag on that rock shelf on the right, and be quick."

Intently the officer listened to that voice. So carefully did he memorize every inflection in it, he would recognize it immediately, anywhere.

"Keep cool, King. He has the advantage now." Sergeant Hardy's voice was low, reassuring, but his eyes, hard,

vigilant swept the rocks above him carefully.

"Must I put the mail—"

"Yes, or he'll blow both of our heads off. He has you covered now."

"Hurry up there." Impatiently the voice rang out. The man, in his eagerness, leaned over the jutting rock on which he lay. In that instant Hardy obtained a good look at the face of the man.

It was a young face. Not more than thirty or so, clean-shaven. The features were fine, regular, with well molded chin. The man drew back swiftly as his eyes met the officer's.

Reluctantly the driver deposited the bag of mail on the designated shelf.

"Now, keep going. And, remember, the trail is straight ahead. I can see you both for a mile. Try to double back and I'll be waiting for you."

"Nevertheless I'll see you—again." Hardy's voice was still cool, dispassionate. It was as though he said, "this is fine traveling weather."

"Mush on, King," Hardy urged in a low voice.

The trail lay clear. Not a dark spot broke its gleaming covering.

Repeatedly Hardy looked back. The fur-clad figure of the man stood motionless. He had descended from his rocky perch, and now stood on the trail watching the swiftly moving dogs, sled and men.

Eagerly he bent over the mail.

Hardy, in a swift backward glance, saw that stooping figure. Instantly he fell out of the dog train.

"Keep going. Notify district headquarters. I'm going back for my man." The words came with shot-like swiftness.

Keith Morely straightened from the mail bags, gazed ahead. Surely there was but one man with the team! Yet the trail still led straight, unbroken by any dark object, save the one man, the dogs and sled.

Unbelieving, he rubbed his eyes. A man could not vanish in thin air!

The mail driver plied the whip, the dogs raced. He would rather have stayed with the sergeant, fought the thing through, shoulder to shoulder. But the officer had spoken, and he was the law!

HALF drowned in the drift into which he had plunged, Hardy lay motionless for a time. Finally he cautiously raised his snow-covered hooded head. He saw the man standing motionless, then watched him turn, scale the slabs of rock until he reached the top, and disappear.

Lithe as a cat, Hardy scaled the overhanging rocks. Crouching like an Indian, his soft ankle-depth moccasins over his boots as noiseless as the foot-fall of a cougar, he sped after Keith Morely.

"Thank the powers for a fine day," Hardy thought. The sun shone daz-zlingly. The prisms of a million ice-drops on shrub and tree flashed like jewels, bewilderingly beautiful.

Warily, Hardy followed the moccasin imprints left on the crusted snow.

"He is heading directly away from the trail, and he knows exactly where he's going. No hesitation in his stride. Ha, he has stopped here to put on his webs."

The snow was crushed into a circular basin where the man had sat to don his snow shoes.

At a little distance ahead came the shrill scolding voices of a pair of chickadees. Hardy nodded in satisfaction. He knew some passing creature had startled the birds. It was their custom to give warning thus from their lofty perches.

The trail led from the rocky plateau through a narrow ravine to the open ground beyond. Keeping a sharp lookout, Hardy paused in this ravine to don his webs, then took up the trail.

"The man is a bird; he doesn't web, he flies!" the officer muttered. "I'm pretty fast myself, but he is faster."

For hours he followed. The sun

was casting crimson shadows; the sparse woods grew denser; the short day became the short twilight.

Hardy was strangely tired, but he was not growing cold, though the air was sharpening. It became too dark to distinguish the faint imprint of the webs. Hardy paused, debating whether to build a fire, then walked on, seeking suitable site for night camp.

There appeared to be a clearing ahead. A dark snow-capped smudge sprang before his eyes. "A cabin," he ejaculated. "I'll spend the night there."

For hours a strange lassitude, a sensation of heat; an increasing throbbing headache had been creeping on him.

"What's the matter with me?" he thought irritably. "Somehow I'm glad to be under a roof to-night."

There was no yellow winking eye of light in the one window of the squat cabin. The officer approached warily, keeping in the deepest shadows. Apparently the cabin was deserted.

With his finger on the trigger of his gun, he raised the latch on the heavy log-built door, kicked it in swiftly.

His eyes strained through the gloom of the cabin. One swift searching look revealed the tenantless interior.

Hardy stepped into the cold room and slammed the door behind him. He dropped into a chair, breathing heavily. A sudden sensation of suffocation seized him. He pushed the fur hood back from his head, loosened the belt of the parka covering his uniform.

"Haven't been feeling really fit for the past three days," he muttered. Pulling himself together with an effort, he came to his feet, investigated the one room and built-on woodshed adjoining. He struck a match to the candle fixed in a bottle, for the room was growing dark.

"Well stocked cabin," he said as he gazed around.

Again he fell heavily in a chair, gazing before him with anxious eyes. After a time he kindled a fire on the big stone hearth.

Slowly the weather changed as the night wore on. The north wind came with a bellow and roar.

Half dozing, Hardy listened to the mingled voices of the wind and fire as he sat before a blazing log. His eyes were glittering with the fever that ran in his veins.

"Glad I came across this cabin," he muttered, with thick tongue and dry, swollen lips. "Must be bilious. Be all right to-morrow. I must!"

THE storm increased in fury. The blizzard howled and tore over the squat cabin. The snow piled up against its wall logs as though seeking the warmth within.

During the night came the crunch, crunch of webs. A white wraith-like figure came through the gloom, eager expectant eyes peered from frozen eyelashes at the light wavering from the cabin's fire-lit frost glazed window.

Stiff hands fumbled at the latch, finally released it. The wind swept the door in with a crash.

Hardy raised heavy-lidded eyes and started to rise, but the effort was too much for him. He sank back like a sack of meal.

Keith Morely kicked the door shut.

Hardy's nerveless hand reached for the gun in his holster, but it was strangely fumbling and uncertain. The two men stared at each other.

"So we both chanced across the same cabin. Put up your hands!" Hardy's voice was thick. The gun wavered in his hand. It seemed intolerably heavy.

Morely stared curiously at that unsteady hand, at the swollen, flushed face of the officer. Despite a tremendous effort it was impossible for Hardy to hold that gun. It clattered to the floor.

Keith Morely's increasing amazement turned slowly to conviction. He sprang swiftly to Hardy as the man's head fell back. The room was filled with his gasping, shallow breathing.

Keith Morely lifted the officer in his powerful arms, carried him to the bunk.

"You're a sick man," he exclaimed. "Tell me quick, while you are still able to talk, have you been exposed to any disease?"

The words penetrated Hardy's fast numbing consciousness.

"A few weeks ago, I laid over a night in an Indian's cabin."

"How long since you were vaccinated?" The question came quick and sharp.

Hardy heard the words, though they seemed to come from a great distance. He struggled to answer, but unconsciousness sealed his tongue.

Swiftly Keith Morely stripped the man, gazed with grave eyes at the all-revealing eruption on the broad chest and armpits.

"Smallpox!" he ejaculated. "There's a lot of it in the north this winter."

Turning to the officer's pack, he opened it up and took out the medicine kit. It was a well stocked case, revealing the thoroughness of the equipment the northern patrol men carry.

"One thing is certain. The officer cannot make me prisoner now, and I can't leave him here to die from neglect. When the owner of this cabin returns, I'll go on. But not before," Morely said grimly.

With peculiar expertness, he bathed the fevered body of Hardy at regular intervals. He administered medicine taken from the case, he applied an ointment to the rapidly increasing eruptions.

"What a freak of fate," he muttered. "The hunter is laid low, and the hunted cares for him." The man's lips lifted in a mirthless smile, but his eyes were somber, haunted.

SLOWLY the days dragged their length. The snow beat back the sun, the country sank under an impenetrable shroud of white.

The owner of the cabin did not re-

turn. "Snowed under, some place," Morely thought as grimly he battled for the life of the officer. No great physician could have shown more interest in the work of a difficult case than did Keith Morely. For hours he sat by the sick man's side, listening to the disjointed delirium.

"He's been through a lot. The men on the northern patrol have a tough time," the listening man thought.

Occasionally, as the days passed, Morely went out with his rifle, returning with fresh meat.

The fever abated, the crisis passed. "Pulled him through," Morely thought, a light of professional satisfaction in his eyes.

He closed the blue service book, belonging to Hardy. The book he had been studying and memorizing. While Hardy slept, his first deep natural sleep since his illness, Morely stripped off his own clothing.

"Fortunate thing we are the same height and build," he thought as he donned Hardy's uniform, which he had fumigated.

Completely garbed in Sergeant Hardy's uniform, he was remarkably like the officer, in figure. Only the face was different, and that would be partly concealed by the fur parka hood.

"In this uniform I can get to Montreal, without pursuit. There, I can secure other clothing, draw funds from the bank, and get to the border. From now, until I reach Montreal, I'm Sergeant Porter Hardy!" The man's shoulders straightened, his head went up.

"I am absolutely safe. It will be weeks before the officer can get out, renew pursuit. By that time, I'll be in the States."

He turned, walked to the bunk, stood staring down at the quietly sleeping man. "Glad I didn't leave him to die like a dog," he murmured. "Haven't *that* on my conscience."

Hardy turned, opened his eyes with

the light of returned reason in them. He stared at the uniformed figure beside him. A perplexed gaze was in his eyes, then slowly he looked around the cabin.

"Ha, I remember. Was taken sick!" He attempted to sit up, but fell back weakly. "I've had a siege," he thought. "Glad to see another man of the service here.

"How long have I been ill? And what's the matter with me?"

Morely stared down at him. Finally:

"You've had the smallpox. But you are right now. On the mend."

Hardy drew a startled breath. That voice! No two voices in the world were identical.

Why was this officer before him speaking with the voice of the mail robber whom he was pursuing? He closed his eyes. Weakness, no doubt, had caused hallucination.

"You have been ill three weeks. You've been a very sick man, but you are on the highway now," that tormenting voice went on. "I'll stay with you until you are able to get out of bed, and help yourself, then—I'll go on."

Hallucination be damned! Hardy's eyes jerked open. Long and steadily he stared at the uniform. His own, of course—there was that mended rent on the tunic sleeve, and that smudge of oil on the left trouser leg!

His eyes swung to the man's face.

"I recognize you. And what are you doing here? Why didn't you get away?" The voice was weak but steady.

"And leave you to die! I'm not that sort of a rotter," Morely said scornfully.

"Then I owe—my recovery—to you?"

YOU owe your life to me, to put it plainly. No one has been near the cabin, for I tacked a red rag over the door. A few Indians have passed. I hailed them from a

distance. Smallpox is raging from the James Bay waters to the lake country of the Athabasca, they said."

"My God!"

"Yes. And for the service I have rendered you, I am appropriating your uniform," Morely went on coolly. "When you are well, you can wear my clothes."

The men looked at each other silently.

He turned, strode to the hearth over which an iron kettle was suspended. Presently he returned.

"A cup of good strong caribou broth." He tendered the cup, lifted and held Hardy while the officer ate.

"All you need now, is to recover your strength. Within a few days you'll be able to hobble around, enough to keep up your fire. The wood house is filled. I have repaired my forage on it. There is a quantity of meat, and I'll leave a big mess cooked, so you won't have to cook for several days. By that time you'll be strong enough—"

"You are singularly thoughtful—under the circumstances," Hardy commented.

"Thoughtfulness be damned. I'm only doing the sporting thing—"

"Criminals usually do not consider that," Hardy interrupted dryly.

Morely raised a startled head. Hardy who was watching him closely, saw the swift dilation of his eyes, noted the sharply drawn breath.

"Now you have talked enough. And by the bye your voice is remarkably strong. You will make a quick mend. No doubt you owe that to the constitution you men of the service have. Now go to sleep again. I want you to get strength quickly, for I'm anxious to be off."

A few days later he left. The cabin seemed strangely lonely, strangely desolate to Hardy, as he lay on the bunk listening to the retreating crunch, crunch of webs, as Morely headed from the cabin onto the trail.

The following morning, before Morely had emerged from his sleeping bag, he heard the tinkle of bells.

An Indian coming from the opposite direction which he traveled, appeared on the trail. His dogs were lean and traveled slowly.

"How is the pest?" Morely asked in the Cree tongue.

The Indian paused. His figure drooped, his shoulders sagged.

"It spreads as does the bush fire. It has struck the Crees, on Woelaston Lake. It is wiping out the Chippeways between Albany and the Churchill.

The Indian spoke with impassive bronze face, but his eyes were deep with melancholy. Morely waited, a great fear in his heart.

"The Crees are wailing their death dirges as they seek the bones of their dead from beneath the charred cabins, for the white men are burning all cabins wherein the pest has been. Our dogs are howling mournfully for masters whose voices are still.

"I passed many trap-houses. They were unbaited; in some, the traps were sprung, yet the trappers came not to gather their catch. The snowshoe trails were many suns old."

"Where do you come from? Have you passed Nichikun Lake post?"

"I came through there—"

"Are there many sick?" Morely interrupted quickly.

"Many are sick. The factor, his squaw and his clerk have answered the call of the Great Spirit."

Morely's face was white. "Who cares for the sick?"

"The priest whose hair is white as the new snow and whose step is slow with the weight of many suns." He glanced at the motionless white man. "I have spoken." His voice fell low, grave. The long line of dogs moved slowly down the trail.

"This is the worst epidemic the North has known," Morely thought.

It was the year in which the north fought grimly the great cataclysm.

The scourge took a thousand lives before it finally surrendered to the heroic efforts of a handful of white men and women.

"And Father du Bois, that gentle, kindly old saint, is fighting alone at the post. Living through the stench, the horror of it! And he is old, frail. I am young, strong, have knowledge and skill." The man stared across the great waste.

"If I go back it means prison for me, for sooner or later I will be caught. When Hardy recovers, he will take up the trail. And yet, my God, to run like a coward! To leave suffering, dying humanity, when I can prevent many deaths, when I can help check the spread of this epidemic.

"McAndrews, his wife and the clerk gone! And Father du Bois, patiently, laboriously is waging his lonely fight. He needs me, the North needs me. What a service I could render!"

He stared in the direction where lay Nichikun Post. Silently his battle went on. Finally he turned, got his pack together, without pausing to make his breakfast. The message of the throbbing Arctic sky had reached his soul. With grim lips and unwavering eyes he turned his face toward Nichikun Post.

"I AM making poor time, afoot. If only I could raise a sled and dogs!" Morely muttered.

With the dawn came the snow. After a quick breakfast he moved on. The wind increased, drove the snow like millions of ice points through the gray atmosphere.

Toward noon Morely saw a cabin sitting like a squat black insect on a field of white. His pulses quickened as he saw the pillar of black smoke vomiting from its chimney and a team of five dogs and sled standing before the place. Head down against the wind that buffeted him at every step, he made his way. The dogs set up a chorus of howls at his approach. A door was flung open.

"Bad day," a laconic voice remarked

as he slipped off his webs and entered. The warmth of the room smote him gratefully. Morely passed his arms through the straps, set the pack outside the cabin. His lips were stiff with cold. For a moment it was impossible for him to speak, or to see in the bright fire-light.

"Was just leaving, but I'll wait awhile and hear the news. How's the pest?"

As the man spoke another figure entered the little cabin, from the wood house.

"Eh bien, Jacques he 'ave more company?" a warm friendly voice shouted.

"I'm not staying long. In a hurry. I want those dogs of yours. Sent out on detail, must make haste." Morely said quietly.

He removed his parka, shaking the snow from it, and stood revealed in the uniform he wore.

"Well met. What district are you from and your name? I'm Corporal English, out of Moose Factory."

Morely wheeled. So blinded had he been by snow and wind, he had not seen the man's uniform when he entered.

"Jacques, he 'ave an honor. Two men of ze Mounted under hees roof," the French trapper murmured. His round black eyes gazed admiringly at the splendid proportions of the two men. Both of them standing six foot, deep chests, stalwart shoulders, slim waisted.

Regretfully he rubbed his hand over his rotund stomach.

"I'm Hardy, Lake St. John," Morely said coolly, returning the other's steady gaze.

He turned to Jacques. "I'll have to commandeer your team."

"You are Porter Hardy?" Corporal English asked.

"Yes." There was no hesitation in Morely's answer. He dared not hesitate!

"Wha' can I do?" M'sieu Eng-leesh

'ave bought my team and sled before you come." Jacques spread his hand despairingly.

"And I'll keep them. Put up your hands while you explain to me why you're wearing a uniform of the service and passing yourself off as Sergeant Hardy! I know Hardy. Give an account of yourself. Who are you?"

THE words came like a shot.

Morely gazed from a pair of inexorable eyes to the blue barrel of English's gun.

With the motion of a cougar, so swift it was, Morely ducked, sprang at English. An upward thrust and the gun clattered to the floor.

Jacques, wide-eyed, moved to a corner, watching the two men as they grappled. He had not understood those few swift words of English's.

The men, their arms gripped around each other, rolled over and over, each seeking an opening. Finally English tore an arm loose. His great hand went around Morely's throat, shutting out the air.

But not for long. As they had rolled on the floor Morely had inch by inch controlled their movements, so that he lay near the fallen revolver.

Desperately stretching an arm and long fingers, he touched the butt of the gun. His chest was rising in shallow gasps, as he attempted to breathe. There was a roar in his eardrums, a fleck of blood dropped from his nostrils.

With one long finger he drew the butt of the gun nearer. His fingers closed around it.

Jacques in his corner watched with fascinated eyes. He saw that English's face was turned away from that out-flung arm, and so was unconscious of Morely's action.

Suddenly English felt the barrel against his side. He turned his head, read the desperation in Morely's eyes.

His grip relaxed. Morely drew in a

breath of air that eased his tortured lungs.

Slowly English came to his feet. With a catlike bound Morely faced him, finger curled on trigger.

Without removing his eyes from the officer's face, Morely addressed the fascinated Jacques.

"I must take your dogs, but do not fear. They will either be returned to you, or I will send payment. Write your name on a slip of paper. Then step outside. Put my pack in the sled. Have you any cooked meat on hand?"

"*Oui, m'sieu,*" Jacques responded with glowing eyes. He had warmed instantly to this man.

"Put all you have in the sled. Also what fish you can spare, for the dogs."

He addressed English, as Jacques sprang to do his bidding.

"If you darken that doorway until I am out of gunshot, I'll shoot. And there's no better shot in the north than myself."

Slowly, he backed to the door, picked up his parka, backed across the threshold.

The door slammed to behind him.

He sprang in the sled, lay flat. As his "mush" cry arose, a bullet from English's rifle, the barrel protruding from under the window roared through the storm.

The dogs sprang forward, instinctively headed for the trail, a stone's throw from the cabin.

Morely smiled grimly. "Good thing I laid flat, or he'd have had me."

Again bullets spat toward the fleeing man. The snow and sleet were so heavy, the wind so high that visibility was poor at even a few yards.

When that trail was reached the cabin was blotted from sight.

Morely sprang from the sled, drew the fur parka over his head, headed the dogs toward Nichikun.

He reëntered the long light sled, the hiss of a moose-hide whip cut through the sleet. The dogs, well fed, in good condition, sprang forward with a will.

Speed was wanted. Speed they would give.

DAILY Hardy's strength was increasing.

Longer each day he sat in the big chair before the crackling fire; then a few steps farther until he could reach the door.

Constantly his thoughts revolved around the man who had stayed with him, brought him through this siege.

The weeks dragged by until a month had passed since Morely's departure.

The weather settled fine, clear, with brilliant sunshine. The white world glittered and sparkled like a sea of flashing jewels.

"I'm strong enough now. If I had dogs I should have left a week ago."

Hardy stood in the open door of the cabin gazing across the country. Far down the trail came several dark specks. Gradually the specks took on shape and substance, became a moving team of dogs, with sled, and a man at the gee-pole.

Opposite the cabin the team turned, made their way to the little building.

"Don't come too near. Smallpox!" he shouted.

Steadily the half-breed came on. When near the cabin he paused.

"Me, I heard you, *mais* eet not matter. I am jus' over ze pest." The trapper lifted a scarred and pitted face to Hardy.

"Dese ees my cabin. I was away in a line-cabin when ze sickness took me. Many weeks 'ave I been gone, but now I, Le Massan, am well, and 'ave come home.

"*Eh bien*, eet ees good to be home." He loosed the dogs from their harness, stepped into the cabin, shut the door behind him.

Rapidly Hardy explained his presence in the man's cabin; told of the fugitive he pursued.

"Many strange things 'appen in de time of de pest. Zis man, he save your life," Le Massan said thoughtfully,

"an' now you go to catch heem an' imprison heem? Zat ees strange." He shrugged.

"Personal obligation has nothing to do with my duty."

"*Oui?* Me, I am glad I am onlee a trapper, for ze squaw who find me w'en I am sick and nurse me back to life, I will marry. So does Le Massan gif hees thanks. *M'sieu l'officier* 'ave no value on hees life w'en he gif no thanks?"

Le Massan's voice and manner were disapproving. He gazed reproachfully at Hardy.

"It is not as simple as you think," he said wearily. "Now, my friend, I want your dogs and sled, also an outfit. I will pay you in cash. I have currency in my money belt."

"An' zis man, he did not take your monee?"

"No, he is not that type of—thief."

Within an hour Hardy left. Le Massan watched with disapproving eyes as Hardy swung onto the trail.

"Which way has he gone? North or south? I would be inclined to think south, perhaps to the nearest railway station. Yet that assumption seems so simple—too simple. Therefore, I turn north."

The day was magnificent. Clear, sparkling, the sun of dazzling brilliance.

It was that transition period between the darkness of winter and the coming of spring, when the world takes on an unearthly aspect. The brilliant sun gave a glaring light. Tree and bush glittered with indescribable beauty.

HARDY had been on the trail several days when he began to notice his blurred vision. "Eyes are weak. Smallpox often leaves a weakened condition of sight," he reassured himself.

Yet the following morning when he awakened he found his lids glued together with a thick sticky substance. By feel only he built his fire, melted a

small pail of snow. For an hour he bathed his swollen lids, separating them at last. But his sight was poor, and an intolerable pain pierced his eyeballs.

All day he kept going, closing his eyes as much as possible against a world that glistened like polished steel. Dimmer grew his vision. By mid afternoon darkness closed in.

"Snow-blind!" For a moment panic seized him, but his iron will quickly controlled it.

"Other men have had the same experience and came through," he told himself grimly.

He sat in the sled, while the dogs trotted up the wind-swept ice, his ears straining for the sound of other sled runners, or the crunch of webs.

"Must be about sundown," Hardy muttered. "Better call a halt."

Suddenly there was a startled yelp from the lead dog, followed by a hoarse chorus of howls.

Desperately Hardy strained his blind eyes. A sharp report, an ominous volley of cracks, the sound of a swift current flowing under the ice told the story. Amid a terrified din from the struggling dogs, Hardy sprang from the sled. The cracks were spreading, widening into a sunburst. Hardy felt the water under his boots.

Swiftly he sprang back. "Oh, God, for a second of sight!" he breathed. Slowly, cautiously he backed. The ice became firm under his boots. He paused, listening to the frenzied struggles and wild howling of the team, until one by one their voices were stilled.

He heard the suction as the sled was drawn into the water.

It is not an uncommon thing in northern waters, that strange, warm undercurrent on which a thin layer of ice forms. Ice deceptive in appearance, but when surmounted by a weight it gives suddenly and treacherously.

Hardy continued to walk backward, realizing if he turned he would be at

a loss to know in which direction he walked.

"Looks bad," he muttered. "Blankets and supplies gone down with the sled. I'll have to keep moving to keep up the circulation."

Wearily he walked during that long night. By morning his muscles stiffened to the consistency of raw cowhide. Weakened from his illness, his vitality lessened swiftly.

Toward morning he stumbled over a low-growing snow-capped bush. Unconsciously he had half circled across the river and reached its wooded shore.

Eagerly with panting breath he felt among the brush, got a pile together, carried them to the shore ice. There were matches in the waterproof case in the parka pocket. Quickly he kindled a fire, a fitful, smoldering little flame, but its warmth was inexpressively grateful to the chilled man.

Many round balls of eyes from culvert and hilltop watched that fire curiously, fearfully.

Hardy did not know it, but death was near, lurking in fangs and claw. If he allowed that blaze to extinguish, the gray terrors of the wild would be on him.

THE old priest raised a shaking hand, touched Morely's face half fearfully. "Ees eet really you, my son? So often 'ave I dreamed that you came like this, only to awaken. Are you real or ees this but another dream?"

His tired, sunken eyes gazed anxiously at the man.

Morely threw an arm around the bowed shoulders, held the thin body to him for a moment. "It is I, father. And the first thing I do is to put you to bed. You are worn out. You need rest. I shall take charge here—"

"*Le bon Dieu!* How often 'ave I prayed for your return, my son! God ees good."

Morely arrived at the peak of the epidemic and threw himself body and

mind into the battle. Day and night he worked with but brief intervals for rest.

"If only I had fresh vaccine!" he groaned. Vigorously he segregated the well from the sick; battled to keep wailing mothers from dying children, fought to keep fathers from stricken sons.

"My son, you mus' rest. So hard you work," the old priest said anxiously.

"Does a soldier rest in the midst of battle, father? When the enemy is in retreat, when it is beaten, then I will rest," Morely said gravely.

For a time the bell in the chapel tolled daily. Gradually at fewer intervals, until a week had passed without a death.

"We've licked it, father!" An exultant light shone in Morely's eyes, but his face was drawn, white from fatigue.

A week passed without a new case. The convalescent were growing stronger.

"There is little to do now at the Post, father. I have time to visit some cabins in the woods. There may be sick in them."

In one cabin he found a dead body. The cabin was burned.

Toward evening he saw the blaze from a camp fire.

"Some traveler. Better investigate," he thought.

His webs were almost soundless as he approached, yet Hardy's keen ears heard the faint crunch.

"Help," he called.

Hoarse though the voice was, Morely recognized it. He froze in his tracks, motionless, scarcely breathing, cold with astonishment.

Screened behind a great tree, Morely watched Hardy take hesitating steps forward, saw him crash into a tree. Amazement held the watching man.

It was growing dark, but there was still light enough to see the trees and brush.

"Blind! Left the cabin too soon. And what a bloodhound he is! He's trailed me almost to the Post!"

Rapidly Morely thought, planned. He webbed to the officer.

"Ha, here you are," the blind man cried. "Thought you had gone on. I need help. Snowblind."

Morely gazed at the swollen lids, glued together over the sightless eyes. He grasped Hardy's arm. In a hoarse, guttural voice he spoke a few words of Cree.

"You're an Indian? Then take me to your cabin. The blindness of the sun-on-the-snow has fallen on me."

"I take you to my lodge," he grunted in Cree. Hardy heaved a sigh of relief.

Morely, who was known and admired as a great medicine man among the Crees of Northern Quebec, knew he could depend on Migisi.

When the Indian heard the men approaching he threw open his door. Morely shook his head and pointed warningly at Hardy.

He led the officer into the warm candle-lit room.

The fragrant odor of broiling deer steak lay in the air.

"Ha, this feels and smells good," Hardy exclaimed.

Beckoning to Migisi, Morely left the cabin, the Indian following.

Lowering his voice cautiously, he told the Indian:

"I have brought this man to you. He is snowblind. I found him on the shore trail. But I do not want him to hear my voice. He thinks an Indian found him, for I spoke to him in Cree. Let him think no one is in the cabin save himself and you. Migisi understands?"

The Indian nodded.

"Watch me, how I care for his eyes. When I leave with the rising sun, you continue the treatment until the light again pierces his eyes.

"If he cannot see by the third sun, come to me. Care for him, Migisi. A

two-pound tin of tobacco shall reward you."

MIGISI'S moccasined footfalls were noiseless as he prepared the supper.

"Migisi care for your eyes now," the Indian grunted. For an hour he watched Morely apply the snow applications on pieces of flour-sacking which he had made sterile by long boiling.

With the dawn Morely left, made his way to the Post.

"He will not leave the cabin until his eyes are thoroughly freed of the inflammation. He realizes it would be too dangerous to his sight, and no matter how impatient he may be, he knows a blind man is out of the Service." Morely thought.

"I have a week. But I must be gone before then. I'll take no chances, for he will make for the Post first thing. God!" The bitter exclamation came like a shot. "How different this has turned out from what I planned! And all my own fault. If I had kept hidden, if Hardy had not seen my face when I stopped the mail, all would have been well.

"I would never have been suspected, could have got back to the Post as I planned. Everything gone wrong, because of that one mishap. Also, I did not know a man of the Mounted would be traveling with the carrier."

There was a continual sound of ax and saw in the air. The men of the Post were busily felling logs, erecting new cabins, making new tables, chairs and bunks. The Post was emerging from her weeks of horror.

The morning of the third day since his finding of Hardy, Migisi came to the Post, sought out Morely.

"The white man's eyes have been pierced by the light. This morning he could see me."

Morely turned to his supply shelves, took a tin of tobacco, gave it to the expectant Indian. When the Indian

had gone, Morely walked swiftly to the old priest's cabin.

"I must leave to-night. It is hard to go, but you can handle the convalescent, and any day the new factor will be here. Our moccasin telegraph has carried word of the deaths of McAndrews, his wife and his clerk to the major posts. They no doubt have long since notified the company.

"Father, I am leaving to-night. I—" Morely paused. It was hard to lie looking in those kindly, loving eyes.

There was a crunch of webs on the snow outside. Some one stopped to remove his webs, then knocked at the cabin door. The old priest hurried to the door, threw it open.

The man in the doorway looked over the white head, directly into the eyes of Morely.

"We meet again," said he. The voice fell curt, hard.

Morely looked from the barrel of the drawn gun into the eyes of Sergeant Hardy!

I ARREST you for the robbery of the mail. Up with your hands!"

Sergeant Hardy's curt voice broke the silence.

"Arrest—mail—wha' you mean?" the old priest faltered.

He turned to Hardy. "Who are you?" he half whispered.

"I am Sergeant Hardy of the Mounted. I was with Jim King, the mail driver, when this man stopped us." Hardy's voice softened as he gazed into the stricken eyes of the old priest.

"Of a certainty there ees some mistake. This ees Dr. Keith Morely—"

"No mistake, father. Look at him. Ask him, if that is necessary."

"My son, you a mail robber? In God's name, why?"

"I should like to know that myself," Hardy commented dryly.

"Tell us." Again that half whispering voice of Father du Bois.

"There was something in the mail I had to have." Morely's voice fell low. "I cut across the country to intercept it. I intended getting what I wanted and return here.

"All would have gone as I had planned, save that Sergeant Hardy happened to be traveling for a distance with the driver. He saw my face. I knew then that I would have to leave the country. I intended doing so, but fate willed otherwise."

"*Mais*, you were gone so long." Father du Bois paused in bewilderment.

"A blizzard came up. The sergeant and I both sought shelter in the same cabin. He was sick—with the pest. I stayed with him until he was convalescent."

"He saved my life, father." For the first time during Morely's narrative Hardy spoke.

Morely studied the officer's reddened eyelids.

"You recovered your sight quickly," he said, "but you must be careful of your eyes."

Hardy stared at him incredulously. How did this man know of his recent blindness?

"How do you know I have been blind?" Hardy asked quickly.

"I did not intend to mention it. It slipped out unawares, but it was I who found you by your camp fire and led you to the Indian's cabin. I spoke to you in Cree so you would not recognize my voice."

"Another obligation, Morely. Seems I am pretty deep in your debt." The men gazed at each other silently.

"Will you continue your narrative?" There was a strange quality in Hardy's voice. "Why did you return here, when you had planned differently?"

"I met an Indian on the trail. He told me of the factor's and his wife's deaths. I realized I was needed. I knew Father du Bois was fighting it alone. I had to return."

Grimly Hardy nodded. The three sat silent. After a time Morely said: "You got the sack of mail, sergeant? It was in good condition, I trust?"

Hardy stared at Morely blankly.

"What do you mean?" he barked.

"Why, surely you returned for the sack? It was not far from the cabin in which we stayed." It was Morely's turn to speak sharply. Incredulously he stared at Hardy's blank face. "Surely you read my note?"

"What note?"

"The note I placed in the parka pocket. The one you are wearing."

Hardy dug deep in the pocket. Pressed into a corner was a small folded piece of paper. He had not noticed it before. He drew it out, glanced at it blankly.

Aloud he read:

"I got what I wanted. You will find the mail sack in that wedge of rocks, where I stopped you and the driver. I piled stones over the crevice to protect it."

The room was silent. After a time: "What did you take from the sack?" Hardy asked.

"A letter. I had no interest in the mail, otherwise. I intended placing it where it eventually would be recovered. Of course my gun threat was only a bluff. I would not have shot—"

"Whose letter was it you ran such risks to secure?" Hardy asked swiftly.

"The factor's, McAndrews. I *had* to have it."

"Explain, Morely."

"I will explain at headquarters," he said slowly.

Father du Bois laid a trembling hand on Hardy's arm.

"Sergeant, I beg of you, do not take this man. You can free heem if you would. You are not onlee an exponent of ze law. You are ze law itself. You who are clad with ze authority of courts, can make your own court here, try, an' release this man."

Hardy was silent, his troubled gaze on the priest's pleading eyes.

"There ees so much sickness. Ze people need ze doctor. Of a certainty he ees needed. Do not take heem away."

"Father, this is not a case wherein I could act as judge." Hardy's voice was low. "I realize all you say. And I also realize my own obligation to my prisoner. Yet, father, you, who would not betray a confession, cannot ask me to violate the code of the Mounted? I cannot possibly consider my personal wishes."

Keith Morely came to his feet.

"I am ready, sergeant. And by the way, your uniform is at my cabin. No doubt you want to wear it? It has been fumigated and aired. We shall stop at the store and get a pair of very dark goggles for your eyes. You must be careful."

Hardy glowed with admiration. Dammit but he liked this man. No cringing, no begging for quarter. Voice cool and steady.

Morely turned. Silently the hands of the priest gripped his.

"When you are shut away between dark walls, have courage, my son. Always my prayers are with you an' I shall be waiting for your return." The gentle voice faltered.

The two men walked to the door. With misty eyes the priest listened to the retreating crunch of their webs.

"I T seems you overstep in pleading this man's case, sergeant."

Inspector McKenzie looked narrowly at Hardy's earnest face.

"I have but given you a detailed report, sir. Only adding that the prisoner saved my life. I believe, twice. I have also reported what I have heard concerning him. I made inquiries at every Post on the way here. I questioned people who know him. He is honored by all.

"He has given three years of his life to the North without reward. His

services are invaluable, for you know, sir, we cannot get half the physicians we need up here. He stamped out the pest at Nichikun. In other Posts, it is still raging. And Jim King, the driver, is dead, too."

The inspector sat silent. "Bring in your prisoner," he said finally.

Hardy saluted, left the inspector's court. Morely raised haggard eyes, questioning.

"He is ready for you. And Dr. Morely, I want to tell you, I'm sorry. Dammit, I'm sorry. I wish I could have—"

"I understand, sergeant." The voice was low, strained.

Inspector McKenzie looked sharply at the man before him.

"What have you got to say?" he snapped.

"I had to have that letter."

"Why?" the inspector barked.

"Haven't you read it? I gave it to the sergeant."

"I want your story first. Then I'll read it."

"McAndrews and I had quarreled bitterly. He accused me of too friendly relations with a half-breed girl at the Post. The accusation was false. The girl was only grateful for my pulling her through a siege of pneumonia. Some one aroused McAndrew's suspicions and he was stubborn. Wouldn't listen to me, or believe me.

"His daughter Alice and I are engaged. She is spending the winter in Quebec, and we were to be married on her return.

"He wrote her, telling her the sort of man he thought I was, and told her to break our engagement immediately.

"She is a type of girl who believes absolutely in her father. Thinks he can do no wrong, that he's never mistaken. She is loyal and devoted to him. He insisted on my reading his letter, doubtless to convince me that Alice was lost to me, irrevocably. And she

would have been. She would never have listened to me." Morely paused a moment.

"I knew the letter went out on that mail. I determined to get it. And I did."

Involuntarily McKenzie nodded. Did a memory of his own hot-blooded youth return to him? Youth that will dare much for the loved one?

"I intended returning immediately to the Post. My short absence would not have been noticed, for I often go in the woods where sickness has been reported. Within a week or so, I intended going to Quebec, and urge Alice to marry me there. I think she would have—for we love each other. Then we would have returned to the Post. For my work is here, in the North, that I love."

Morely fell silent.

"Seems to me it was an act of—er—Providence that Alice McAndrews never received that letter. Her father and mother dead, the poor girl needs the man she loves," Hardy ventured. He kept a wary eye on the inspector as he spoke.

McKenzie stared at his sergeant fixedly, then picked up McAndrews's letter. He read it thoughtfully, his heavy brows drawn together, his face grave.

Morely's hopes died. There was no softness, no sympathy in that rocklike face.

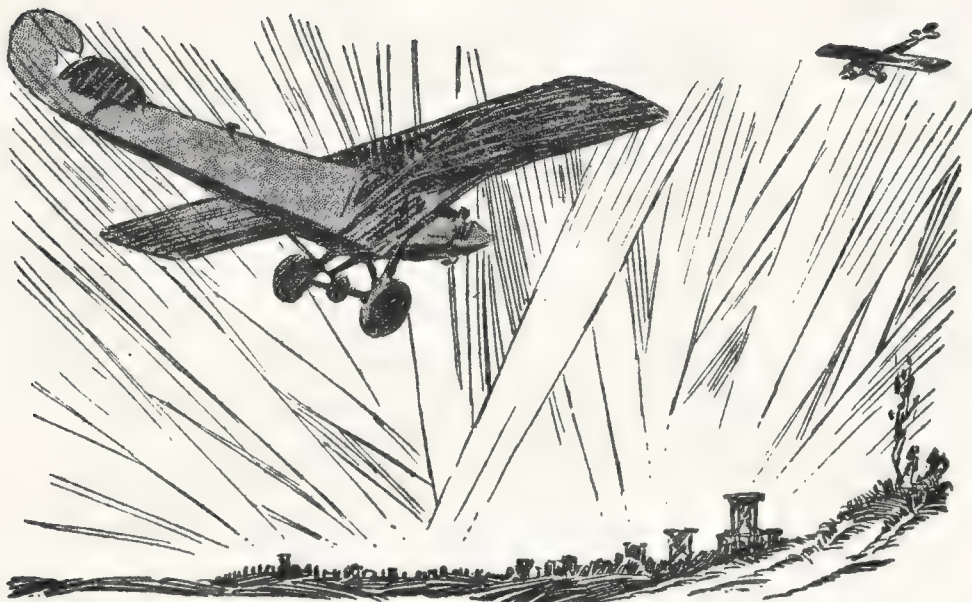
To be locked in prison, while the pest still raged! When he was so badly needed! And Alice, alone in her bereavement—he groaned aloud.

Hardy's face was moody as he watched McKenzie.

"The law recognizes extenuating circumstances," McKenzie was speaking. "I feel that I am justified in dismissing this case. You are free, Dr. Morely."

He rose, held out his hand. Inspector McKenzie's eyes twinkled as he looked at his sergeant.

THE END



A few planes came up cautiously to inspect us

A Brand New World

While a bewildered world waits in apprehension, Graff the Xenephrene brings his deadly and irresistible weapons to Earth

By RAY CUMMINGS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

XENEPHRENE, a new planet, plunges our solar system into chaos in 1952, twisting the Earth's axis toward the sun and inflicting Arctic cold on all the northern hemisphere. Invaders land near deserted New York, dissolving our scout planes in their "Crimson Sound."

Zetta, a fairy-like Xenephrene girl, has landed in Porto Rico to help earth; but the invaders carry her, Professor Vanderstuyft, and his daughter Hulda back to Xenephrene. Two years later he sends instructions and the gravity-destroying chemical "Reet" in a meteorite to his son Peter. He, Freddie Smith, and Hulda's fiancé, Dan Cain, fly to Xenephrene.

In that strange metallic world, with its cities on top of forests, the super-civilized Garlands have returned to pastoral life, leaving a coterie of scientists to protect them, with the crimson and purple globes of the Infra-red Control, from the creatures of the submerged Infra-red world which would otherwise plunge the planet into the madness of the Crimson Sound. Garla's criminals, the Brauns, are led by the strong and evil Graff, who made the exploratory invasion of earth and plans to conquer it. He covets Zetta. The woman Brea, who loves him, tries to kill Zetta.

Graff is converting the populace of Garla to his earth invasion; meantime

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 22

the visitors from earth, with the help of Kean, a reformed Braun, plan to steal the Garlands' mysterious weapons. But while Graff is addressing the populace of Garla, his Brauns steal the Infra-red Control. Garla is doomed—and the little group from earth suddenly see Graff's plan—invasion and our earth driven mad!

CHAPTER XVI.

ON OUR WAY TO CONQUER THE EARTH!

IN the confusion I found myself pushed a considerable distance, separated from all our party. I could not see any of them; with the scrambling throng, the changing scene I could not at first determine where we had been sitting. Then I saw the place; it was empty. I strove to get there, fighting my way. The amphitheater was fast emptying. The official voice was still bellowing. Guards were leaping away, perhaps rushing to the grotto. In the distance across the city a siren was sounding—a long electrical scream.

I thought, over near the gate through which a press of people were surging, that I saw father. I forced my way in that direction; went through the gate. They ought to be waiting for me here. But they were not.

A cross street ran down at an angle here into the forest vegetation—a narrow, shaky-looking causeway of fiber. It was unlighted, dark with straggling moonlight—a purple, ghostly-looking street. It seemed at the moment empty of people—the throng surged past it, keeping to the upper level.

From behind me as I stood there a dark-cloaked figure darted past me and plunged down it. Dan! It was as tall as he; it seemed moving with our earthly heavy tread. I started down after it; I would have shouted, but the words choked me. It was not Dan—not anyone of earth, for all its solid gait! It passed through a shaft of

moonlight; from the cloak, I saw a white arm hanging. Waving.

This was a man, carrying some one; I caught a glimpse of the bulk of the other body he was holding in his arms, under his cloak. He disappeared down into the purple darkness. Memory of the little tug I had felt in my fingers as Zetta's hair was withdrawn sprang to me now. Was that Zetta under that cloak? Her arm I had seen waving from beneath it?

With the Essen automatic in my hand I found myself plunging, half falling, down the flimsy street. Beneath the strain of my incautious descent, it bent and crackled. Houses like nests were set here in the dark, pod-laden foliage. They sagged with me as I passed. A woman came to the window of one of them and shouted.

I reached the ground. A vaulted, tunnel-like street was cut through the jungle. Ahead of me, a hundred yards or so, the moonlight showed clear where the jungle ended and the open country began. I thought I saw the hooded figure hurrying out there. I ran—I wondered if I would get a chance to shoot. If that were Zetta he was carrying I would not dare.

I think now I have never been, before or since, so incautious. I came with a rush out of the dark depths of the forest, into an open moonlit area. A red glow hovered like a circular curtain near at hand. Within a dozen steps of me, a small railed platform lay upon the ground. Men were on it. Brauns! A black-hooded figure was standing holding Zetta! Zetta, with fear sweeping her face as she saw me appear.

I must have stood for an instant in confusion. I remember casting off the impediment of my cloak. A dozen men came leaping at me. I fired the Essen, but hit no one. It was knocked from my hand as one of the leaping bodies struck me.

They closed in on me. I turned and swung at them. Flimsy things! My

dirk tore into the shoulder of one. He went down with a scream. The dirk had buried, hilt and all; I let it go. I wrenched an arm loose from around my neck; hit another man full in the face. Two others I knocked aside with a sweep of my arm. Another leaped astride my back, but I heaved him off as though he were a child clinging there. They must have been without weapons. They clung, bit and tore at me—a ring of them struggling to hold me.

I burst through them; but, like birds, they were at me again. One I lifted bodily and hurled a dozen feet. Another I caught by his legs, whirling him, a thirty-pound bludgeon to knock the others away. I had almost reached Zetta. I shouted to her—I do not know what. She answered; but it was a scream of warning. I turned too late. Some one from behind crashed a block of metal stone on my head. I went down into soundless, empty darkness.

WHEN I recovered consciousness I was lying on the platform. It was in mid-air; I could feel it sway, feel the rush of wind past me on that thirty-foot square, railed platform. Some fifteen men crowded near its center, where in a small pit, its anti-gravity, lifting mechanism was installed. It was this pit—a white glow there—which first I saw when I opened my eyes. The glow shone upward upon the faces and figures of the seated men. Brauns. I sat up unsteadily. One of my captors was beside me. He murmured an unintelligible command; but when he saw I only intended to sit up, he relaxed.

The platform was sailing through the purple moonlight. I was too far from the rail to see over it to the ground, but in the distance I could make out a line of the metal mountains—naked crags glistening under the stars.

From behind a platform a yellow

fire streamed out, like a vessel's wake; we were being propelled forward by the impulse of its thrust against the air. Vertical and horizontal rudders were back there. In front also, and to the sides, were small lateral wing-rudders.

A gentle hand touched my shoulder. Zetta was seated beside me. Unharméd, her face lighting with relief that I, too, seemed uninjured. My head was roaring from the blow; blood, now drying, matted my hair. But it seemed only a scalp wound.

The man guarding us called to his fellows; two of them came and looked me over, and then went back. The guard moved to seat himself between us and the rail. Zetta and I were left free to talk. She had been seated beside me in the Stadium; when the panic began she had turned to see our two insect guards vanishing under a tiny red beam.

She had leaped up, unnoticed in the confusion, and had seen me fall. Hulda was nearest her. She called, but a hand over her mouth stifled it. She was carried off. Her captor had crouched hidden near the gate, with his cloak over them, waiting his chance to get unobserved down the little street. At the forest entrance, when they were about to take her on the platform, I had burst upon them.

This was not the platform upon which Graff and his men had escaped from the amphitheater. "That is much larger," said Zetta. "It is ahead of us now."

"They're taking us to the Braun city?"

"Yes. It is not so much farther. Oh, Peter, you have been lying here like death so ver' long time!"

Zetta's account of her abduction, it suddenly struck me, did not ring wholly true. I eyed her.

"Did you try to escape from the man who seized you in the Stadium?" I demanded.

She understood me at once. She shook her head. "No. Mus' I confess

it? I will, Peter. I heard that the controls were stolen—doom for my world—perhaps for yours."

She stopped. I said: "So you gave yourself up? Is that it?"

"No. Not just that. The man had me—but you ask me frankly if I try to escape. I said no."

"You mean you're glad you're here?"

"Yes," she said solemnly. "In what other way possibly could I help my Garla, or your earth?"

"You think you can help them?"

She shrugged. She was almost unbelievably calm, but I knew it was a pose. "Perhaps. If there is any way I can influence Graff—I am no fool, I will do my best—oh, Peter, not you would I have sacrificed! I did not know you were following—did not know you would be taken—"

"But Zetta, darling—"

"Peter—please!"

She was building a wall up between us! "I am not pledged to you yet, Peter—"

I thought it best to drop the subject then.

There were many other such small platforms escaping from Garla. They came presently, converging in upon us. We sailed high over the border—a thin, very tall latticed wall stretched over the country to mark it.

Zetta pointed. "The border search-beams are gone. Our guards all dead—it was what Kean feared. These platforms came into Garla unseen—taking back the Brauns and what they have stolen."

The Infra-red control globes! They were on Graff's platform, undoubtedly.

"See!" exclaimed Zetta. "There are the city lights!"

Ahead, a great yellow radiance illuminated the sky. The full moon was low to one side of us; to the other, the dawn was coming. Almost soundlessly we swept on. Over a sea of deep purple water, with a barren metal plain beyond it.

The city came up into view. Tremendous metal buildings, set in terraces upon a barren metal rock surface. Fantastic structures, aerial like a giant hive. Spider-web bridges of gleaming metal; giant ladders; metal causeways swinging from cables at heights tremendous. All aerial, spiderlike, fantastically unreal. Glaring with blasts of yellow light; roaring with the noises of industry.

We swept over it at a considerable height and dropped into a broad metallic pit in the plain beyond. A pit two hundred feet deep and several miles across. It was flooded with yellow radiance. Brauns crowded close around us; but I caught glimpses of a great activity. A thousand men at least were busy here. Platforms were landing, like ours from the direction of Garla. A large one was already here.

Zetta and I were pushed to the ground. A dozen or more space-flying globes of various sizes—somewhat similar to the one Dan, Freddie and I had used coming from earth—stood about. At a distance one gigantic affair—a great terraced cylinder with banks of windows like a monster modern steamship—lay on a raised stone platform. Ladders led up to it from the pit-bottom. Our captors shoved us, though not ungently, in that direction.

Graff's expedition to earth! His forces, embarking now! I saw very little of it as with a crowd of Brauns around me I was shoved toward the monster vehicle. The sloping ladders had wide steps one above the other at nearly ten-foot intervals. At a word of command, Zetta bounded up.

They let down a cable, hooked it on me, hauled me up the fifty-foot height. I saw them leading Zetta away. She turned toward me, but they forced her on. A Braun abruptly threw a metal hook around me, pinning my arms. I was jerked through a doorway, down a long echoing metal

passage and thrown into a metal room, which had a single bull's-eye window. The door slammed upon me. I was left alone.

Within an hour, in the light of my second dawn upon Xenephrene, we left the purple planet on our way to conquer the earth.

CHAPTER XVII.

PLANNING THE CONQUEST.

"WELL," said Graff. "I had not thought to have you with me, but you are welcome. A pleasure—"

I got to my feet; I had been lying on the bare metal floor. We were well beyond Xenephrene's atmosphere now. And so insistent are the human mundane needs—amid all my perturbed thoughts of the future, my worry over Zetta, my aching head with a miserable gash and lump on it—my chief trouble at the moment was an almost intolerable hunger.

I swayed as I stood up; Graff put out his hand to steady me. "You're not hurt?"

"No. I'm hungry."

"That is good. Zetta said you would be. Well, you shall be fed. Come with me." He stood off, regarding me. I must have been a disheveled enough figure; wide-flaring, corded gray riding trousers, tight over the knee; heavy rolled stockings; a white shirt, open at the throat, torn and with Braun blood upon it; and with my own blood matting my tousled hair.

"You are a strong-looking little fellow," Graff chuckled. "My men, worse luck to them, told me how you fought them. It is my idea—now that you are here with me—you would not run wild like that again. Is it so?"

"Yes," I agreed. Why not? Of what use for me to try to fight, penned up here? I added: "Besides, your men took my weapons."

He was leading me down a long metal passage with closed doors along it at intervals. "Yes. They look interesting—the mechanical one particularly. I mus' get you to explain it to me. Zetta says you will be ver' helpful to me. I think she is right. A clever little girl, Zetta."

His words made my blood run cold! But I kept silent. We entered a wide room, set amidship of the vehicle; through its windows I could see the black firmament on both sides—the great, star-filled void of Space.

Zetta was here, perched on a bench before a high table littered with parchment sheets. She flashed me a smile and a warning glance. Food was on the table near her.

"Your breakfast, Peter," she said calmly. "Sit here."

I ate. Strange meal! Strange food of Xenephrene, but stranger still we three as we sat there. Graff sat pleasantly talking. He seemed in a high good humor; wholly frank and sincere. But I wondered; sometimes I fancied he was gently ironical.

"There were two or three other earthmen besides yourself who came into my hands, Peter. All of them—unfortunately—died. You—I think—may not die. Do you know why? First, because Zetta has ask' me to let you live—and I would do anything to please her. That is—almos' anything. Second, because she has promise' me you will help with my campaign. Will you?"

At his brusque question, I hesitated; Zetta's warning glance decided me.

"Yes," I said.

"I mean, really help. I will be able to guess at once you try to fool me. Do not try it, frien' Peter!"

I began: "I don't see how I can help you—"

"He'll help you," Zetta put in.

"Information about your worl'," Graff explained. "There are many things you know, which I do not. Zetta and I have been talking over my

plans—I will be the greatest man on your earth, Peter—”

It decided me. A vain glory was his weakness. He wanted to impress Zetta; he seemed even to take a pleasure in impressing me. Zetta was playing upon it. We would give him information, authentic enough, which would help him undoubtedly. But we would learn his plans, too. Work with him, as he wished; and once on earth—

I said: “I can see no harm in helping you. Especially if it will benefit me.” I smiled shrewdly. “Will it?”

I thought perhaps he swallowed my bait, but I could not be sure. He said emphatically: “If you work with me, I will make you secon’ greatest man in your worl’.”

And Zetta? I wondered. I had only an instant alone with her that day. She whispered: “You were perfec’, Peter. Work with him—learn what you can. Tell him truthfully what he asks. It is necessary—best in the end.”

“But Zetta, you—”

“I can take care of myself. He would not harm me. He wants to make me love him. That, truly, he desires. I am letting him try.”

“He won’t give up his plans—he’ll give up nothing for you—”

“No, of course, not. But I preten’ I think maybe he will—move! There he comes! In a few days perhaps he will leave us more alone.”

“When we get to earth—”

But she had moved away from me as Graff approached.

WE were twelve days reaching earth. Dan, Freddie, and I had made the voyage in eleven days. In this great ship we were traveling faster; but the distance, with Xenephrene drawing away from the earth, was greater now.

It was a monotonous voyage. I was housed alone in a cabin with fairly comfortable furniture. Three times a day, Graff personally came and took me to that larger room, where invariably I

found my meal awaiting me. Of all the rest of the ship—its men, its equipment—I saw nothing.

Zetta very often was in the cabin when I was brought in to my meal. Occasionally I saw the woman Brea. Once, when for a moment Zetta and I were alone, I glanced behind us to see Brea’s giant figure lurking in the doorway. Watching us; I caught a glimpse of her face—white, thin-lipped, with eyes that seemed smoldering with fury. There is a menace in the aspect of a man who is a scoundrel; but it is mild and meek indeed compared to the scoundrel woman!

“Zetta, is that Brea ever left near you? Alone with you?”

“No. Oh, no. I watch her.”

“She’s there now in the passage doorway.”

“Yes. I see her.”

“Don’t forget. She tried to have you murdered! Does Graff know that?”

“I think so. She would not dare harm me here—he would kill her.”

“Don’t you be too sure. A woman—a jealous woman—might do anything.”

But Zetta only laughed. “Perhaps we may use her, Peter. When we get to earth—” She would not say any more.

Graff was constantly questioning me. The chaos Xenephrene’s coming had brought to earth seemed intensely interesting to him. He understood astronomy far better than I did, undoubtedly. We talked of the changed inclination of earth’s axis; the changed climate. He questioned me about the different countries—most of them were only names to him. He wanted to know the distribution of the people; the different races; the present great centers of population; the agricultural areas.

“You are ver’ helpful, Peter.” He seemed to mean it. “It is all quite confusing. So big a worl’—populate’ over all its surface. A ver’ great conquest for me, Zetta, don’t you think so?”

I tried to get information from him. It was not easy. He only wanted to

talk generalities, both about earth, and about himself. He had asked me nothing about airplanes or warships—nothing at all about the weapons of war on earth. Except the Essen automatic of mine which he had taken. He laid it on the table before us. I explained it to him; the whole theory of explosives.

"That is mos' interesting." But he did not seem greatly impressed. "I suppose you make these things quite large?"

"Yes," I agreed. And since he asked no more, I volunteered nothing further.

From Graff I learned that there were already on earth several hundred of his men. Hiding, as he put it. They had with them only a very small hand battery with which they could fling around them the crimson barrage. The fellow who had attacked us at Cain's, trying to steal the Reet battery, was one of them.

I said: "That crimson barrage—in a larger form—was all you had yourself, when you were on earth before?"

He laughed. "I had other things—it was no time to use them."

"But now—you have other things with you now?"

"Oh, yes, I have other things, Peter."

He had in this expedition some ten thousand men—and nearly a thousand of the Garland insects. And there were several thousand women and children. The Braun race—earth's future ruling race—these were to be the pioneers. They were not all on this vehicle; there were others, equally as large. And several small globes. This vehicle held only the main equipment—the scientific apparatus for war. He mentioned flying platforms, more mobile for low-altitude air transportation than this great Space liner; I gathered that they were platforms similar to the one on which Zetta and I had been brought from Garla.

"How are the other Space vehicles going to find you?" I suggested.

"We are leading. I shall pick out an earth base and then signal them where it is. Soon, Peter, before we get to earth, you and I mus' talk some serious details. You will help me pick our earth base—"

I saw then the wisdom of Zetta's plan that we should be in Graff's confidence; here, at least, I could influence him. His landing place on earth; I would urge him as best I could to where he would do earth least damage. Perhaps I might even be able to sway his whole campaign into a channel least damaging to us.

Once I mentioned the Infra-red control. He shut me up very sharply.

THERE was one time during the voyage when by chance I overheard Graff and Zetta when they thought they were alone. It was Graff in a new light. Amazing scoundrel! I thought at the time—and I still think—that in this one instance at least, every word that he uttered was truthful and sincere.

I could hear and see both him and Zetta plainly. They were in Graff's cabin, where I ate my meals; I was in the length of passageway leading to my room, which now was freely allowed me. I cannot claim I did not try to eavesdrop; for most assuredly I did.

Graff was saying: "If you insis' I talk in English, I will do it. For the practice, as you say." Did Zetta know I overheard them? Did she want me thus to realize upon what basis they were? I think so; but I have never known it for a certainty. "And if we are to live on earth, Zetta, it is best. The race which speaks English is greatest on earth. Is it so?"

"I think, yes."

They were sitting by the table; I saw him reach out and touch her arm, saw her involuntarily shrink away.

"Zetta! You hurt me much when you do that."

"I cannot help it, Graff."

He leaned toward her. I could see his face. Sincere—for the moment absolutely sincere.

"You are afraid of me?"

"No, I am not."

"Do not be, Zetta. I love you—I want you to marry me in whatever fashion they use on earth." His voice was impassioned. "Oh, Zetta, what a future there will be for you and me! Cannot you see it? Look ahead! I will be greatest man of this great world."

He suddenly stood up before her, drawn to his full height, his great bare arms with the dangling chains extended up before him with a gesture of power. A kingly figure indeed! A white-haired, blue-eyed Viking of old; but there was about him as well, an aspect of modernity—a modern, conquering scientist.

"Look at me, Zetta! A man of whom you will be proud! You—just a little girl—to yourself you will say: 'There is my man, greatest in the world'. I love him.'"

"Ah!" she said. "If I did, Graff."

"You will, I treat you gently." Abruptly he held one of his huge hands before her. "With this hand, I could twist the neck of that Peter."

I doubted it very much!

"I do not do that, because you ask me not to, Zetta."

"And because he will always be of great help to you," she retorted slyly.

He was taken somewhat aback. "Yes, that is true. But for the other reason also. I try to please you—"

I could see her gaze measuring him. She looked so small, sitting there before him; but I knew that with her keen woman's instinct she was planning how to handle him best.

"You captured me, Graff. Brought me here, by force. When we get to earth, will you let me go?"

"No! I had to bring you—I must keep you with me. How else, if you are not with me, can I make you love me?"

She said gently, "Perhaps you go about it wrongly."

"No. I think not. I tried leaving you alone. I was a ver' great man among my Braun people—but you say you have never loved me. It is the love I want—nothing else! You know that! Your love—without that, you are nothing!"

I must admit he said it with regal dignity which to the woman must have been impressive. For just that moment, Zetta's emotion must have been touched. Her hand went impulsively toward him.

"I believe you, Graff. It is why I have no fear of you."

He did not follow his advantage. He said, "I am glad. In a few days we will land upon earth. I shall be ver' busy—we will talk no more of this for a long time. But I want you to know—everything I do will be for you."

She said slowly, "If you want to please me, give it up. You have stolen the Red Control. You have doomed your own world and mine to disaster. And now you would attack the earth, which never has harmed you. Wait, hear me this time, Graff! Perhaps—if now we were—to turn back—perhaps back on Xenephrene I might find—I loved you—"

He checked her; he was frowning. "You have said that before—do not say it again! I love you—but I am a man—a ruler. You are nothing but a woman. Do you think my love is so unworthy of us that I would let you wreck our destiny? I will not! The man who is mastered by a woman no longer is a man! You would not love me! That is a lie! You will love me as I am, and I am made for great deeds. Enough of this!"

He strode away from her; stopped and turned. "When I am master of the earth we will talk of this again. You say woman's love comes unbidden? Perhaps it does—we will wait then upon its pleasure. But remember this: No woman ever loved a man

who was a weakling. I want not that kind of woman's love!"

He strode from the room.

"LET us get to the details," said Graff. My supper was finished; he pushed away the dishes. We were approaching the earth; slowing down now; in another twenty-four or thirty-six hours we would be ready to land. Zetta was seated across the cabin. Graff had drawn two long tables together; a bank of parchment insect lamps was over them with the illumination shaded downward.

Graff added, "Zetta thinks you might be able to draw me a map of your world. Could you?"

Geography had been rather my hobby. "I think so," I said readily. "I can draw you one, fairly accurate, on the old Mercator's projection."

"What is that?"

I explained it; the surface spread flat; the lines of latitude and longitude at right angles rather than in a simulation of the globular surface. He nodded.

"That will do all right. Try it now. I will catch you, and you must explain as you do it. We must pick our landing place and plan the general campaign. Here, Zetta, help us."

He unrolled a white opaque parchment some four feet by six. Zetta fastened it flat to the table. For a pen, I had a metal point in a small handle, with a dangling wire. The point glowed and etched a thin dark line on the parchment. And there was a very serviceable set of drawing instruments—one for measuring angles, the equivalent of a ruler, a compass—and an intricate affair which drew at will every variety of curve—circle, ellipses of every eccentricity, parabola, hyperbola, many other curves which Graff named, but which were unfamiliar to me. And there was a pantagraph—

He explained the uses of these various instruments. "Go ahead," he said.

I took perhaps two hours. It was

doubtless a very crude world map I drew from memory. But in its broadest features it was fairly accurate. I laid down the horizontal equator; spaced parallel lines, above it, and below; drew the Greenwich meridian and the others at ten-degree intervals.

There was a time, in my university days, when I knew with fair exactitude the latitude and longitude of most of the world's great cities. I marked them now as dots; and from them, the coast lines grew.

Graff was intensely interested. When I had the main national boundaries sketched in, he stopped me. "That will do us ver' nicely. Show me where the daylight is now."

I calculated. It was now by earth-time, the noon of July 7, 1957; almost exactly mid-spring in the north, and mid-autumn in the south. The equator was pointing toward the sun. The days and nights were now about equal at the equator—each some twelve hours long, shading off into twilight at the poles.

"And next month?" said Graff.

"The nights are lengthening in the south. The days are lengthening in the north."

He made me mark it all on the map; the changes of daylight and darkness, and the approximate climate from now until early October, when the North Pole would point to the sun. Then it would be all heat and daylight in the north, shading to equatorial twilight, down to the night and cold of the southern hemisphere.

"My campaign may run until then," he said. "It is these months I am most interested in." He added abruptly, "Where would you advise me to land?"

It was my opening. "That depends on many things—there's a great deal you'll have to tell me, Graff," I said frankly. I smiled. "You can't have a council of war, with your chief councilor wholly ignorant of everything."

"Ver' true, Peter. I will tell you

what you want to know." My heart leaped with exultation. I had his confidence at last!

"Our weapons," I said. My first inclusion of myself with him! He took it without notice. "Our weapons. Our method of warfare. What countries we think best to attack first. We'll have the whole world against us, you know."

"I know it."

"Our defense—"

"That is simple, Peter. We have only one, but it is impregnable against anything they have on earth."

"The crimson barrage?"

"Yes."

"Can you lay it over a widespread area? How wide? Graff, is it your idea to capture a great spread of country—devastate it—"

"I cannot," he said. "I can include within the barrage an area what you would call a circle of ten-mile diameter. Four such circles, if I wish to divide my forces. Not much more."

He described how his batteries supplied projectors of the crimson light. It would extend some fifty thousand feet into the air and sidewise some five hundred feet on each side of its source. A projector thus must be set about every thousand feet. He had enough of them to include four ten-mile areas. His storage batteries would last, he said, for continuous use some three months.

"I can stand the barrage up into the air, or tilt it forward, level with the ground—it is then a beam which will annihilate what it touches—"

"With about fifty thousand feet—ten miles—effective range," I finished.

"Exactly so, Peter. But with it in that horizontal position we have a barrage height of only five hundred feet. It is my plan to select a base, in some area not ver' crowded. From there we can move within our barrage over any area of country we wish to take."

"Move how, Graff? On land? Sea?"

"And in the air—over land and sea. We can mount the barrage projectors

on our platforms. They will fly; and they will float upon earth's 'water'—I have made sure of that."

We discussed it for another hour. Midnight came; Zetta served us with food and hot drink. Graff was planning to destroy what he could of earth until such time as the leading governments would acknowledge his supremacy.

"I will have them bring all their weapons before me—we will send them into nothingness with our crimson sound. Our Braun weapons then will rule earth indeed! I shall build my city upon your faired land, and all your nations will pay me tribute. My Garland insects will work for me. The earth people will work for me. Our Braun race will spread—"

His plans after conquest were of a rosy hue. He dwelt on them, while Zetta and I listened in silence.

"Your colony will be small," I said finally. "Your five thousand women—"

"A new race will come on earth. The blending of the two worl's."

"Won't you bring more of your people from Xenephrene?"

Zetta said suddenly, "Xenephrene is doomed."

Graff frowned at her. "That was necessary, Peter. Ver' unfortunate. No. We who have left, plan not to return. Nor send for others—the best of us are here. Zetta is a silly child—silly with woman sentiment. Why should we bother with Xenephrene? A ver' small worl', so little of it habitable. I was master there—"

He had not been master, save of his small minority, themselves in subjection. "—But it was not big enough for me. I have lef' it to its destiny."

Left it to its fate—its doom! But I only smiled. "We must decide where we are to land upon earth," I suggested. "Do you want the daylight or darkness?"

He ran his finger along the line of the equator. "Here. In the equal days and nights. It will be warm?"

"Yes."

"That I want. How warm?"

"Like Garla. Warmer probably."

He nodded. "And from there, I will go north, following the warmth and daylight. What is here, Peter?"

HIS finger was on the equator in South America. My heart quickened. Our new great cities of the Western World were springing up, there in Ecuador, Venezuela, the Guianas, northern Brazil. This area was thronged now with colonists. They were planning, at the Falls of the Iguazu, to supply light and heat through all the Americas. Vast industrial plants were planned for these new cities. It would be the industrial and mining center of our western hemisphere. He must not land there!

"It used to be jungle," I said casually. "And small, rather backward nations. Down there in Bolivia and Peru—all the equatorial Andes region—there were great mining possibilities, largely undeveloped. It has changed a little now."

I led his interest elsewhere. The East Indies, where my great Dutch Islands were thriving now with a new activity, drew his attention. But I distracted him. We determined at last upon the plains north of Mombassa, in British East Africa. A fair land with the new climate, but, as yet not densely settled, except to the north and northwest.

In the north were Abyssinia and the Egyptian Sudan—the great valley of the Nile. To the northwest, the Libyan and Saharan deserts. These were springing into fertile, temperate areas. The governments of Great Britain, France and Spain were locating down there. But I felt I could keep Graff away from this region. Graff would want to move north. I would make him move northeast—up the African coast, over Eastern Abyssinia and get him across the Gulf of Aden, into Arabia, Persia and thence to the

sparsely settled, still barren lands of the Central Asian Socialists.

"What about your food supplies?" I demanded. "You can't maintain your people very long with what you've brought, can you?"

"No," he said. "But I will get food from the country we capture. You must show me where at this season the agriculture is under way. Perhaps, too, you have some large government storehouse now which I could seize."

He listened carefully as I pointed out the route into Socialist mid-Asia. "What we want," I said, "is to frighten the world—bring it to our feet. Not to devastate it completely, with nothing to rule afterward but a chaos. You must be careful, Graff, as future emperor, not to wreck the food supply of your new domain. It's precarious at best now, you know."

"I understand," he said gravely. "You are right in that, Peter. We will bring them to yield—very quickly, I hope. Tell me in detail what they will use as weapons against us."

He seemed tireless. For another hour or two, I explained as best I could the armament of the great nations. It was all chaotic since the Great Change. Indeed, I was sure of very little I said. Most of the world capitals had moved; all the races and centers of population had shifted. Nations were disintegrating, blending as their people moved in wholesale flight to new areas.

In a few years most of the world would be united almost like one big family. There had been no thought, since the Great Change, of maintaining national armaments. The worst possible time to have an invader from another planet attack us! But this latter, I did not explain to Graff.

Still another hour. "Graff," I said abruptly. "You never mention the Infra-red Control. What part will it play?"

I expected he might frown his displeasure. He did not. He met me with an imperturbable smile. "You

are tired, Peter," he said calmly. It was nearly dawn; Zetta had been listening to me silently, but keenly aware of my motives. But she, too, now was tired. She flashed me a warning look when I mentioned the Control.

Graff's slow smile continued. "Peter, you go to your cabin. I will work this out."

I slept. It must have been noon when I was awakened, not by Graff, but by a Braun I had never seen before. In Graff's cabin my meal was waiting. Zetta was not there. Graff was still poring over my map; I think he had not left it.

"Sit down, Peter."

When I was fairly eating, he gestured at the map. "I have made my decision. We will land in north Brazil. I will also send a force to Central Africa. It can move north over the Sahara grain fields, into Europe. And from Brazil we can move north and south. I think that North and South Americas and Europe and Africa are most important places to attack, Peter. We will frighten them, if we attack them there!"

Irony was in his voice and in his smile! And I had thought to influence this fellow!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EARTH AT BAY!

HISTORY will record that the forces of Graff, the Xenephrene, landed upon earth at 2 A.M., July 9, 1957, in north Brazil, at one degree fourteen minutes north latitude, and sixty-one degrees twenty-two minutes west longitude. There was no one person on earth who saw more than a fragment of what followed during those frightful weeks; out of a myriad accounts, history will piece a pallid, dispassionate vision of the whole.

For myself, I witnessed many horrible things. But only fragments—as an ant with its tiny viewpoint sees the

forest through which it crawls, and might futilely try to describe it. I can only name facts; imagination must supply the rest, and even then inevitably fall far short of the grim, tragic reality.

I was crouching with Graff and Zetta at a floor window of the giant Space liner when, that July 9, we slowly settled to within a thousand feet of the ground. A dark, tropic, overcast night.

From beneath our bow a crimson, howling radiance, one of the barrage projectors, sprang downward. There was no one left alive over the ten-mile circular area around which our barrage was flung that night, to tell what happened. I saw the houses of this newly-settled agricultural area melt and vanish as we swept them with the radiance.

The barrage went up. By dawn, all the country near us was deserted of its people, who fled in terror as far away from us as they could get. The tropic jungle had wilted since the Great Change. The land here was cleared; broad, fertile fields, planted now with grain, corn, and garden produce. Prosperous farms, crowded with settlers in their small, new houses. New villages. Several small cities. Over a hundred mile area they were deserted within a day.

Graff's other vehicles arrived. One was dispatched to Africa. It landed in the French Sudan, in latitude fifteen degrees five minutes north and longitude three degrees nineteen minutes west—not far south of the city of Timbuktu, which had tripled in size and importance since the Great Change. The red barrage was flung up here, but it was on the flying platforms. Within a day it began moving directly north.

Around our encampment in north Brazil, the barrage projectors were mounted on the ground for a permanent stay. A ten-mile circle. It included a stream. I found Graff had apparatus for distilling the water, for

drinking supply. He foraged out for food, even though he had a three months' supply with him. He began building dwelling houses for his women and children—using materials he had brought, and materials his insects dragged in from the neighboring, abandoned villages.

An incredible activity. By the end of July his permanent base was well established. We had been attacked. I can only hint at the surprise, the panic, our landing caused all over the world. Since the Great Change, the last thing that had been thought of was war.

The nations were concerned with their bare existence—the welfare of their people. War between them was an impossibility. The great battle fleets of Britain, the United States, France and Japan were no longer armed for combat. Most of the vessels had been dismantled of their armament, converted into transports, for the people in distress and for the transportation of food.

Armies were organized now as government industrial and agricultural workers. Every government was in the business of producing, buying, storing, and selling food. The war airplanes were used for transportation; thousands of the great Arctic A type were in commission—but few of them were armed.

The world was wholly unprepared and unequipped for war. Nevertheless, Graff's base in north Brazil was attacked. Railroad lines were near us. They were abandoned to traffic within some fifty miles of us. But an armored train was run up in the night. It shelled us with a long-range gun. One of Graff's foraging parties outside the barrage was struck and most of its members killed. But the screaming shells—they came all one night at twenty minute intervals—exploded harmlessly against our barrage.

A few planes came up cautiously to inspect us. One must have risen over the ten mile height of our barrage. It

dropped bombs. One of them fell within our lines. It killed a dozen men and working insects, and wrecked some of our apparatus; it barely missed our group of vehicles, lying on the river bank in the center of our encampment. I doubt if that aviator ever knew how true was his aim of that one bomb.

The train with its thirty-mile range gun was gone at dawn. But it came again the next night. I went with Graff, aloft on a small platform, high over our lines. Through the red glow of our barrage we could see the train in the distance—a blur of moving lights. We carried a single small projector. At dawn we sailed out, through a momentary break in the barrage. The train saw us coming. It retreated, swinging and swaying over its rails at an eighty-mile-an-hour gait. It was a Garga locomotive, and a flat car. Puffing, snorting, careening through the country to avoid us. But we caught it. There was nothing there in a moment but a tumbled heap of its heavier steel parts. We sailed back.

THE world during these days must have been frantically assembling its armament. Our Brazil base continued to be harassed. By July 15, our river quite suddenly went dry. We found that some fifty miles up the course on a distant rise of ground they had mounted a queerly-fashioned projector. It might have been from Xenephrene itself!

It was Freddie's heat-projector, sent here from Miami by the United States government. It had an effective range of some two miles, and its heat—they must have been applying it continuously for several days—had dried up the small watercourse, sending it up in clouds of steam.

Graff ordered an attacking platform out. It never returned. Miraculously, a long-range gun must have hit it. Then we found that, still farther up, they were damming our stream. Graff

let them alone. We sent out foraging parties at intervals for water. They were frequently attacked.

From Zetta, I sometimes had translated accounts of these hand-to-hand engagements. Graff had a variety of small hand weapons with which his foraging men were generally armed. Hand batteries of the purple Reet-current. They shot very short, purple stabs of flame. I recalled seeing the guards use them that night in the Garla Stadium.

There were hand knives, not unlike the Spanish machete. And occasionally Graff used a lethal gas. It clung by its weight close to the ground. The wind would sometimes sweep it over a village. A peculiarly inhuman weapon; I recall that in the war of 1914 something of the kind was said to have been used extensively.

The small purple flame projectors interested me particularly. I persuaded Graff to show me one. The crimson barrage was a form of Reet; so was this purple light. The one a low vibration rate; the other, a high. Both, of course, were akin to the Control globes. I tried again to mention the Control, but Graff shut me up. He was not using it, as yet. I found out soon afterward that, by every artifice in her power, Zetta was holding him back.

But he explained the purple flame. It stabbed into the crimson barrage, neutralized it. With one of these small projectors, a man at a distance of ten feet or so could stab a small hole through our red radiance. Graff used this small hand projector to blind the earthmen at short range, and to explode their gunpowder weapons in their hands—both of which it evidently did with great efficacy.

I said casually: "The Garlands had these purple projectors?"

"Of course, Peter."

"And, Graff, why couldn't that be made in a larger form? A giant purple beam?"

"It could. The Garlands have it."

My thoughts were running tumultuously. Father, Dan, and Freddie were up there in Garla. I said, still casually: "Then the Garlands could have penetrated our barrage—neutralized it?"

He smiled lugubriously. "Yes. That is what they did to me when I attack' them years ago."

Graff was in a good mood this day. He showed me some of the defensive apparatus he had brought along. "I do not need it here, Peter. But I have it, jus' the same."

Insulated garments which one might wear and be impervious, at least partially, to the red barrage. Infra-red goggles to protect the sight; ear grids to bar out the sound—to raise it again to the normal vibration to which our human ears are accustomed.

"Why," I said, "with these one might walk through our barrage!"

"Yes," he agreed, "I should not care to try it—but one might get through safely."

He put them away.

WE had no reports from Africa. But it was over there that in these early days the greatest damage to earth was done. The flying ring of platforms with the vehicle in their midst, had immediately begun moving northward.

Slowly some two or three hundred miles a day, but inexorably, impervious to every attack that could be sent against them, they blazed a ten-mile twisting trail, northward across Africa—a trail of queerly blank, dead-gray surface of empty earth.

It was as though some giant finger of death were dragging, trailing itself over the continent. It cut a swath through Timbaktu, trailed over the newly settled, newly fertile Sahara, swung east over the mountains into the erstwhile Libyan desert; then north over the Mediterranean. It was there by July 20.

A fleet of warships, hastily assembled from every nation, was in the Mediter-

anean. The red enemy flew high. Its barrage was downward. The ships, at a fair distance, withstood the red glow. Especially at night. The world was learning the nature of this gruesome enemy.

The crimson screaming radiance seemed more deadly, more uncanny in the darkness of night. But it was not. Our sunlight was favorable to it; by day its range was greatly increased. Graff knew it. He had told me he would follow the daylight northward!

The great steel ships in the Mediterranean—if they kept off several miles—were safe, especially at night. Safe from annihilation! But on them must have been queer, uncanny scenes!

One, just south of Malta, was caught in a fringe of outflung red beam. Those on board have told what for a minute or two they went through. It was night. The ship's lights went out. Its dynamos were burned. There were several explosions aboard. But the ship escaped. Its men were half deafened; eyes red, smarting and strained; a queer irritation of the skin. And many were laughing with an hysteria which no one could explain.

The invaders turned east from Malta. They were never unduly aggressive, the barrage generally was closely held for defense—save that over the land it blighted always that ten-mile swath. They passed over the isles of Greece and again turned north. Heading up into mid-Europe. Before them—as well as their course could be guessed for it always was erratic—the country was deserted. A rout, with occasionally an old fortress, or a group of armed earth planes, or a railroad line with an armored train, making a brief, futile stand.

During this period the few Brauns whom Graff had sent previously to earth now began to make their appearance. A few, scattered individuals; they were found in various localities, and by the earth people summarily killed. In mid-Europe a group of them

—a hundred or more—suddenly appeared and made a stand. Graff's expedition rescued them, took them aboard the flying platforms. They were the last, I think, of the scattered Xenephrenes; no others ever appeared, anywhere on earth.

The last week in July saw us spreading out in South America. Our permanent camp housed the women, children and the older men. They maintained the barrage. The insects were working with the men building the town.

With a ring of flying platforms, we made a sortie north. A week up and back. We laid waste a swath through central Venezuela to the coast; we returned with a western swing, through Colombia, Ecuador, north Peru and back to our base. By July 30 it was evident that the earth people were doing their best to evacuate all the territory inclosed by the circle we had cut. Graff saw it; a new idea gripped him.

"We can patrol it, Peter. With a few platforms I can hold this territory—and spread farther."

It was an area roughly from five degrees south to seventeen degrees north latitude, and from sixty degrees to seventy-eight degrees west longitude. A small Space-flying globe was now dispatched with a message to the east. It joined Graff's other force in mid-Europe. Together they moved in one leap to the Orient, landed in Java, and began sweeping the East Indies. They attacked the rich Dutch islands near the equator, which with the new climate we Dutch had proudly thought would become the fairest places of the earth.

From an island there was no swift escape for the multitudes of panic-stricken people—I have read that they flung themselves into the sea by thousands.

I have seen the great Javan temples, which in the 1940's before the Great Change, we Dutch were using as a lure for the tourist trade—seen them in ruins as they looked when the Xene-

phrenes had passed. They say that the Banda Sea, in August, reeked with the bodies floating in it.

Fair, green islands, metamorphosed from the tropic to a temperate zone, were laid waste without a living human remaining. From twenty degrees north to twenty degrees south—down into the best land of the Australian continent, up beyond the Philippines—the East was devastated.

Graff's plan was to drive the world's people away from the equator. There was only mid-Africa left, and his force now went back there.

"**W**E'LL see," said Graff. "Perhaps—long ago, who knows, they are willing to yield. You can go with me, Peter. We will deliver them a message and see what they have to say."

It was the first week in August. We took a small Space-flying globe. Just Graff and I, with three or four of his men to handle it. Then Zetta wanted to go. Graff agreed. He was always pleased to have her with him; his vanity was pleased that she should see his triumphs.

I think, too, that he would not have cared to leave her in the camp with Brea. The woman was a snakelike menace. Graff seemed contemptuous of her. He told me once he had promised, long before, to marry her, but had since decided it was not to his liking.

We started in the globe, and sailing high, watchful that no airplane could get up to attack us, we went to Miami. At a twenty-mile height, we waited for nightfall. The nights were brief now in this northern latitude. We had prepared a small metal cylinder. I wrote the message to go in it.

"To the governments of the earth, from Graff, the Xenephrene."

We told them that if they wished to yield, we would name our terms, and give directions for the destroying of all their armament. One condition of surrender we named now, in advance.

From ten degrees north to ten degrees south latitude, all the land in the world was permanently to be evacuated—to be held by the Xenephrenes.

Graff, with his fifteen or eighteen thousand people, could not possibly be expected to use or need more than a fraction of this land area, as I had pointed out to him. But he had great, if somewhat nebulous, colonization plans. Earth men and women from several of the different earth races chosen by him, were to be sent, to be selected and judged by him as the old Eugenic sect once thought to judge the applicants for future parenthood.

A hundred thousand such earth people would come and swear allegiance to his ruling government. With his Brauns they would build new cities; populate this most benign central region of earth; build their new and greater civilization—breed their new race, the best of the two worlds.

We directed the Miami authorities that if this message were received, they should notify us by a swaying white searchlight beam from Miami Beach the following night. We would then wait another two nights. Then, the night of August 7, if the beam showed again, swaying, we would know they desired to yield. But if it stood straight up into the sky, motionless, we would understand they still defied us. We made no threats—our deeds, not our words, would speak for us.

We dropped the cylinder into the outskirts of Miami. It went down, flaming like a beacon from the blazing gas we had ignited in its top. It fell, as close as I could judge, near the Greater Miami—Fort Lauderdale line. By daylight we hung fifty miles high, waiting.

I HAVE been told, and I can fairly imagine, the scene at the conference which was held in the Miami War Department during those three following long days with the brief nights between them.

At this daylight season there was a freight and passenger air line flying from Miami to the Canaries, with connections at the Canaries for the recently established capitals of Great Britain and France, near the Barbary Coast.

Upon one of these liners representatives of all the European governments came hastily to assemble at Miami; from Japan came leaders of the Oriental powers; and from Caracas—greatest capital now of Latin America—came the newly elected President of the Pan American Union.

Graff and I, in our devastating swing up through Venezuela late in July, had passed not far west of Caracas; those had been anxious moments for me.

I need not picture that grave, solemn conference of the World Powers in Miami that August 6. I understand it lasted without intermission for some thirty-six hours. They had determined to yield.

A giant searchlight was erected at Miami Beach. It swayed its answer that the cylinder had been found—that Graff's message was being considered. We saw it. We hung far, inaccessibly far aloft, waiting for the decision.

The night of August 7 came. The conference was ending. The definite decision to yield had been reached. From the War Department a telephone was connected with the little house at the beach where the operator was ready to flash the signal. Our War Secretary rose to his feet.

"Shall I phone him now, gentlemen?" They say his voice nearly broke.

There was a silent assent. From the adjoining room a telephone rang sharply; then another. A confusion in there. Telephones ringing, and the government radio sounding a peremptory incoming call. A confusion, while the War Secretary stood irresolute. Then an Under Secretary burst into the room. "A globe from Space has landed in the Everglades!"

A few moments, and from a dozen sources came the details. Professor Vanderstuyft had arrived from Xenephrene! With his daughter, and Daniel Cain, Frederick Smith—and a young man, a Xenephrene friendly to earth—named Kean. They had weapons with them with which to fight this invader! They were no more than fifty miles from Miami, and were being rushed to the conference by a government Arctic A.

We were crouching over the floor of our hovering globe, gazing down at the shadowy outlines of the Florida coast. The twilight of August 7 deepened into night. No searchlight beam showed. We waited. We did not see father's globe come down: I did not know anything about it until afterward.

The hours passed. "They will yield," said Graff confidently. "They postpone now the humiliating hour. But before the dawn we will see their searchlight beam. It will waver, tremble—jus' as in their own hearts they are wavering, trembling."

And Zetta and I thought so, too. The short night passed; the twilight of dawn began showing. And then the white beam from down there sprang up. It stood vertical. Motionless!

For a moment we stared at it, almost unbelieving. Moisture clouded my sight of it; my brave world, firmly shining its defiance!

Graff sprang to his feet. "Why! Incredible! They have not yielded?"

Anger contorted his face—chagrin was in his voice. I think he felt the chagrin more strongly from Zetta's presence.

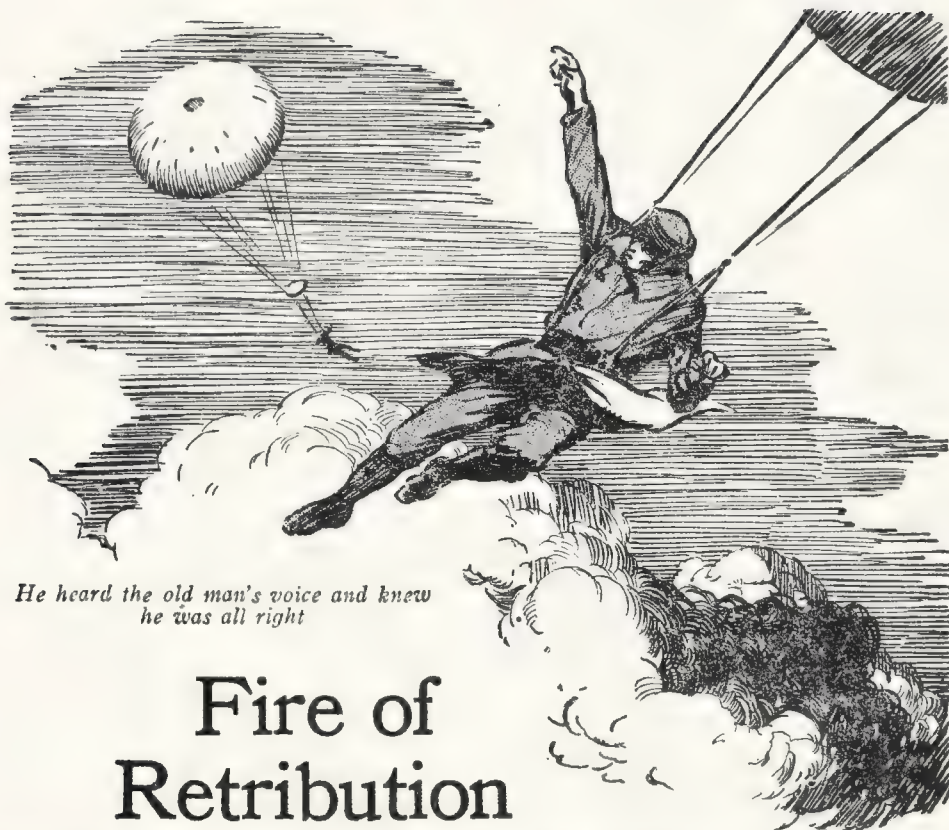
"So they will not yield? The worse for them! You shall see now the Red Control, Peter!"

"No!" burst out Zetta. "You mus' not do that, Graff!"

His laugh was grim.

"You shall see! The Red Control—I will loose it now upon them!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



*He heard the old man's voice and knew
he was all right*

Fire of Retribution

For a man who never flew before to step from an airplane into space thousands of feet above the earth—that takes nerve! Yet old Beth knew that was the only slim chance for his fire-trapped logging crew

By LAURENCE DONOVAN

"**S**LOW timed fire bombs started the blaze—we run onto one of them that hadn't exploded! Whoever done it, knew a cross-fire would trap th' men at the camp—"

Old Beth's gaunt face worked with a grim tightening around his lips.

"Reckon you boys could fly 'round the fire 'fore it hits th' camp. I ain't ever been up in a plane, but I've heard you could drop a man anywhere with one of them parachutes—I'll take a chance. We gotta put an intake valve on that engine, load th' men an' make a run for it down th' mountain."

Nick Mims, fire patrol pilot, de-

murred at first, not because he lacked the guts to go, but orders were orders.

According to the old logger, Beth, his camp high on Round Top mountain was cut off by the fire from all the trails leading down. And once the flames sweeping up the slopes had reached the camp, there was no escape.

"But, Nick, we gotta do it."

Five or six times during old Beth's recital, Jack Singer, mechanic and relief pilot, had reiterated this. In the back of young Singer's mind was the thought of his wife, Nellie. She was camping with friends in the Priest Lake vicinity. Last year there had been a

bad fire there, too. Supposing Nellie were trapped? Jack kept thinking of that.

"We gotta do it," he affirmed, impatiently.

"Yeh," agreed Nick at last, reluctantly. "An' if we crash, it's curtains for our jobs—if we get out."

"Them boys must be facin' hell up there right now," said Beth. "They can see the blaze for miles. The dinky-engine will come hell-beltin' down th' grade through th' cutover stuff—she might make it if we could only get her started. But th' dinky's settin' on a mile of level track—gotta have that intake fixed 'fore they could fire 'er."

"Who'd you think set the fires?" asked Nick, his gray eyes glinting.

"You sort o' put a crimp in Hinton's monopoly by gettin' the rail right o' way 'cross his cutover land an' runnin' logs to the lake, didn't you?"

"Hinton wouldn't murder my boys," said Beth. "He's my enemy, not theirs."

"Let's go," said the older pilot. "It's a chance. We'll fly around an' volplane down over the mountain top. There ain't ozone enough in the draft over that fire to keep the motor turnin'."

OLD man Beth was making his first flight. He had had the parachute strapped on, asking for detailed instructions about its use. He feared the height; and the idea of jumping into two or three thousand feet of space was appalling. But a score of his boys were in the fire-rimmed camp. Old man Beth would give them their one slim chance of escape or he would die with them.

Jack saw there was no shaking his intention.

"Dinky engineer there," he asked, "to put in the valve and get 'er out?"

"I'll get 'er patched up," evaded the old man. "I been 'round dinky engines a lot."

Jack knew then it was as he suspected. The dinky engineer was not in the

camp. Probably not a man there was mechanic enough to install and adjust an intake valve properly, let alone drive the dinky down that perilous ten-mile grade to the terminal at the mouth of the St. Joe on the lake. If old Beth were sure the jump meant death, he'd jump out of the plane regardless.

"You'll likely land in a tree-top," Nick told Beth. "Don't try to slip through if you do. The 'chute will hang you up. Grab on, cut your straps an' climb down if you can. Cut your cord as soon as you jump. I'll zoom the ship so you'll be safe enough."

Nick sent the plane along the Cœur D'Alene lake shore until they were directly opposite the mouth of the St. Joe River and the circling fire on Round Top mountain above it. He banked the Stearman, pulled the control stick hard back and climbed.

Beth groaned when the plane had topped the drifting gray smoke. The flames had been rushing up the mountain at greater speed than he had figured. Less than two miles, as nearly as he could judge, separated the logging camp site from the fire.

Jack watched Beth, and he knew when the old man turned sick. The draft of hot air from the flames, roaring over the mountain top made the going bumpy. The big Stearman rocked, dropped, caught the air cushion and bounced along through the air holes. Jack's own stomach was not sitting so pretty and he was aware that Beth was having a bad time of it.

This form of air sickness is closely akin to seasickness and it requires all of a man's nerve to keep a stiff upper lip. But Beth's mouth was a straight line. He was looking down through the floor windows and he touched Jack's shoulder.

Jack had a glimpse of white through the trees a mile or so down the mountainside. The camp then was still untouched, but at any moment a drifting brand borne on the wind might jump the fire along for the extra mile or two.

At a point about fifteen hundred feet above the mountainside, where he dared swing no closer to the dangerous up-draft from the fire, Nick idled the engine for an instant and called out:

"Close as we can come—get set an' jump when I swing!"

Although his face was tinged with a grayish pallor, old man Beth arose and stood ready while Jack unlatched the door. Jack saw that Beth did not look down and he knew why. Sheer grit is required to step off into nothingness. The old man was looking only at the door. His right hand was on the 'chute's rip cord.

Nick gave the motor the gas and tilted the wings sharply.

"Now!" he shouted and waved his hand.

BETH took one firm step toward the door and vanished over the side.

Jack turned instantly, touched Nick's shoulder, and before the older pilot could remonstrate, dropped out the open door after the old man.

Nick was not so surprised as Jack expected he might be. He had known all the time that Jack would take the jump. He had kept silent because he did not want Jack to know that he knew. Nick swung the plane back toward the mountain top.

It was his job to get back to the mouth of the St. Joe and have emergency facilities ready. They would be needed if the desperate attempt at rescue succeeded.

Jack was relieved when he saw that Beth's 'chute had opened. Two or three hundred feet below him the round top of the 'chute was swinging in the wind. Underneath he caught a glimpse of Beth's swaying body. He saw all of this in the split seconds it required him to fall head downward past Beth's 'chute. He wanted Beth to know he was with him, so he did not rip his cord until he was a hundred feet or so under the old man. When his umbrella spread, he waved his hand and

shouted. He heard the old man's voice and knew he was all right.

The wind created by the miles of solid fire front below swept the 'chutes swiftly toward the mountain side. The worst moment of their descent was at hand. Jack had been hung in the spike-topped cedars on previous occasions. But he was the lucky one of the pair this time. The edge of his 'chute twisted off a branching limb, and although Jack landed with a jolt, he was on the ground unhurt. Old man Beth was less fortunate.

Beth's umbrella was spiked squarely in the top of a slender cedar. Jack, freeing himself from the straps, got under the tree. Beth was fumbling with the cords and Jack saw he was cutting them.

A hard object came hurtling through the air and narrowly missed Jack's head. Jack smiled grimly. It was the new intake air valve for the dinky.

"Get th' valve—don't wait for me—I'll make it down—"

Despite his own perilous situation, Beth's mind was fixed on getting the log train engine working. But Jack stayed below until he saw the old man had freed himself and was making his way slowly down the tree. Beth reached the lower limbs of the cedar and was attempting to cling to the trunk when a branch snapped. He fell heavily at Jack's feet, and Jack grew sick as he saw how the old man's leg had twisted under him.

Heedless of Beth's protests, Jack got him to his shoulder and started down the mountain toward the camp. He was making slow progress when he heard a crashing in the bush. Four or five of the logging crew had seen the plane and the 'chutes. They contrived a rough sling for old man Beth, and one of the men hurried ahead with Jack to the camp.

Occasional brands and sparks were falling near by. Jack looked along the twisting log track, with its light, rusted rails, and his heart sank.

Men of the logging crew crowded around, a new hope succeeding the black despair with which they had watched the crawling blaze. Jack had the pipes apart and the intake valve in place when Beth was brought in. His fractured leg did not prevent the old man from thinking.

"Grab down the canvas an' souse it in the springs," he directed. "Get the wet canvas an' all th' gunny sacks we've got onto the cars—when we get goin', every man wrap himself up—it'll likely be hotter'n blue hell, but the wet rags'll help.

"The track doesn't hit the heavy timber—goes across the cutover land, so it ain't likely there'll be any trees blockin' 'er. The cutover'll be hot, but we couldn't go through th' tall stuff."

PLENTY of willing hands piled wood into the firebox when the valve job was done. Whether they survived or perished, Jack was glad he had come. Inexpert hands, he was sure, could not have installed the intake valve.

Jack's only twinge of conscience concerned Nellie. But had she known, she would have had him do as he did. She was game, was Nellie.

Jack watched the needle creep up on the steam gauge. The suspense of waiting for power to move was worse than all the rest had been. Jack helped get the dripping tent canvas on the cars to help protect the men. Bearded, silent, overgrown boys they were. Some had the strained look around their eyes that told what the hours of watching the approach of the blazing death had meant.

At last the steam hissed from the safety cock. Beth advised that they haul three of the flat cars. He figured it would give the men more room to fight the blaze, if the wet canvas proved insufficient to safeguard them. With two men stoking the firebox, Jack tested the throttle. The dinky

coughed and its four teetering wheels bit into the rails. They were beginning to move.

Some one shouted from the rear car. A brand had fired the woods directly behind them and the blaze was spreading. They were moving in the nick of time. Some of the men shouted again, and Beth called to Jack to stop. Jack could not hear distinctly, but when he had shut off the steam, Beth told him to wait for a minute.

"Three or four campers from up on the mountain just got into the clearin'," Beth explained across the top of the tender. "They're gettin' 'em covered with canvas on our last car. There—they're all clear—let 'er go."

The dinky coughed and the wheels spun again. Jack got no reassurance as to the light engine's stability from the rocking movement over the poorly built track, even at its first slow speed. The track ran for a mile on a level grade around the mountainside. This had been the loading spur. The dinky dragged the flats at a speed of less than ten miles an hour. To Jack, accustomed to the rushing take-off of his planes, they seemed scarcely to move. The acrid tang of the wood smoke drifted into the open cab and stung Jack's nostrils and throat.

He should have provided himself with one of the wet sacks or a strip of canvas. But old man Beth had thought of that, too. A lumberjack came climbing over the wood on the tender, dragging a wet canvas. Jack wrapped one end around his shoulders and trailed the remainder for the stocky little Irishman who was poking wood into the firebox.

The dinky puffed nobly and its wheels slipped and screamed on the rails as it strove to gather speed, despite the dragging weight of the flat cars. The chuffing exhaust drowned all other sound. The tall cedars and Pondosa pine trees began to move past more swiftly. It was like riding a smoke-filled tunnel.

Just before the dinky reached the downgrade curve, a vagary of the wind swept the smoke back. Jack had a view of thin rails that dipped suddenly over the brink and corkscrewed down the mountain. He figured he would hold the dinky to low speed until they actually entered the heated zone. But the brakes?

Good Lord! He had not thought of that.

THE logging train was not equipped with air appliances. Hand brakes on the flats were used to ease the loads of logs down the mountain. Jack sent his fireman back over the tender to instruct the men about the brakes. And, if they got into fire so hot that the men could not expose themselves, well—Jack refused to think further along that line.

Jack had thought he had taken extreme risks in the planes. But up in the air you could see something. Now the smoke closed in again and he was compelled to draw a corner of the wet canvas across his mouth and nose.

They were on the very brink of the grade. Instead of the dinky pulling the flats, Jack could now feel the shoving weight of the cars. The dinky was leaping ahead and down. If he had only thought of those brakes sooner. But the wheels squealed and grated on the rails. The men of the logging crew knew their stuff. For a mile they eased along, the smoke lifting and dropping, alternately shutting off Jack's wind and giving him a chance to breathe.

Jack's fireman crouched under the corner of the damp canvas. The dinky and the flats would run by gravity all the way to the transfer pier on the St. Joe River, if they held the rails.

The smoke lifted. For an instant Jack had a sense of relief. But the reason for the sudden swirling of the smoke wiped that out. A sheeted wall of flame leaped across the track ahead. The men on the cars had seen it, too.

Jack felt the dinky lurch forward. The brakes on the flats had been released.

It seemed to Jack that the weight behind must hurl the rolling little engine from the rails. But the drive-wheel flanges were tapered for just that sort of thing. The wheels screeched, but they held.

The flames sent a stinging tongue through the cab window. Jack instinctively jerked the corner of the canvas over his face. The hot wind tore at him like a breath from a furnace. He smelled the hair singeing on the backs of his hands. The little Irishman crawled close to his legs under the canvas. The dinky and the flats had become a blind rocket rushing down the mountainside.

The dinky rocked and lurched. Jack prayed inside that there might be nothing across the rails. He groaned as he thought of what would happen if a burned tree had fallen to block their way. He hoped that if they failed that he might be utterly destroyed. That would be better for Nellie than having him brought home afterward.

Jack risked a look ahead. The corner of the wet canvas was steaming. In front on either side the blaze was leaping and licking at short growth trees. Beth had been right. Only the fact that this was cutover land, small stuff, might save them. In the heavier timber of the virgin forest they would not have had a chance.

Their rushing speed now was more like the swift dash of an airplane. But a plane could go up. The dinky and the flats could only become a twisted mass of wood and iron if they were ditched. A blast, hotter than all the others, scorched Jack's face. He got his head under the wet canvas again before he breathed, which was well. One draught of that blaze into his lungs and whether they held the track or plunged into the superheated ground would not have mattered to him.

It seemed like an hour or more they had been tearing along, hemmed in by

the blaze. Probably it was no more than a minute, for the swathe of the fire was less than a mile in width. A quick cooler draught struck Jack's face. He pulled away the canvas. For the first time since leaving the upper level he could see the track ahead. Two snaky rails were running toward him and disappearing under the dinky.

Jack heard the wheels squeal again. The men were striving to set the brakes. Their speed did not seem to lessen perceptibly. He heard a loud snap on one of the flats. A brake chain had parted. One of the men came crawling over the top of the tender, clinging to the swaying sides.

"We can't hold 'er!" he shouted. "Don't try brak'in' th' dinky—you'll pile 'er up."

CURVES where the track disappeared shot up the mountain toward them, and miraculously disappeared under the engine and cars just when Jack was sure they would be catapulted into the wall on one side or over the precipice on the other.

"If she holds we kin check 'er on th' loadin' pier—gotta mile run there," said the lumberjack in Jack's ear.

A long straight stretch of track, steeply pitched, loomed ahead. They were out of the fire zone now. Bushes and small trees became a weaving wall of green on either side. The dinky plunged into a cut. Jack breathed easier.

"Cross th' highway just ahead," yelled the lumberjack. "State road 'round th' lake."

Jack had a flash of the road. It wound up alongside the track on one side before it crossed. On the other it disappeared abruptly behind the wall of the cut. Jack thought of his whistle, but the steam was down. The whistle made no sound.

The automobile roadster that shot from behind the wall of the cut almost cleared the rails ahead of the rushing

dinky. Jack thought it had, until, in a brief backward glance, he saw the little car turning over and over down the steep bluff below the highway. That same flashing view revealed another car coming down the highway and then the dinky shot around a curve and the scene was shut off.

"God!" cried Jack, "I hope nobody's killed."

"Musta heard th' dinky," said the lumberjack. "Can't be helped now—only a mile to go—'round that next bend—I'm goin' back—we'll try an' stop 'er."

The dinky and the flats, with brakes grinding, stopped on the long level stretch of the transfer tracks. Nick was among the first to reach the dinky. Jack felt strangely light and a confused blur of faces danced before him.

"Jack! Oh, Jack!"

He opened his eyes with warm, moist lips on his own. Nellie? It couldn't be Nellie down here. She was camping up at Priest Lake.

But it was. She had been with the party that had gone for the trip up Round Top mountain. She was one of the party that had been under the canvas on that last flat.

Jack struggled to his feet despite the protests of Nellie and Nick. He saw old man Beth lying on a stretcher ready to be placed in a car. Beth reached out his hand. He tried to speak, but no words came.

A man came hurrying across the transfer pier from the office. He came straight to Beth.

"Hinton's killed," he said. "Just got the phone message from the fire warden. He'd been chasing him. His roadster went off the highway, turned over. Had a case of fire bombs in the back. Some of them exploded—burned up the car—Hinton was caught underneath."

"The mills of the gods," said old man Beth in a hushed voice, his fingers tightening on Jack's hand.



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



FACT OR FICTION?

A REMARKABLE story we consider "Rain Magic," with which Erle Stanley Gardner returns to the ARGOSY in this issue. And just as remarkable is the source from which it sprang. After you have finished the story read Mr. Gardner's interesting letter below:

Is "Rain Magic" fact or fiction? I wish I knew.

Some of it is fiction, I know, because I invented connecting incidents and wove them into the yarn. It's the rest of it that haunts me. At the time I thought it was just a wild lie of an old desert rat. And then I came to believe it was true.

Anyhow, here are the facts, and the reader can judge for himself.

About six months ago I went stale on Western stories. My characters became fuzzy in my mind; my descriptions lacked that intangible something that makes a story pack a punch. I knew I had to get out and gather new material.

So I got a camp wagon. It's a truck containing a complete living outfit—bed, bath, hot and cold water, radio, writing desk, closet, stove, *et cetera*. I struck out into the trackless desert, following old, abandoned roads, sometimes making my own roads. I was writing as I went, meeting old prospectors, putting them on paper, getting steeped in the desert environment.

February 13 found me at a little spring in the middle of barren desert. As far as I knew there wasn't a soul within miles.

Then I heard steps, the sound of a voice. I got up from my typewriter, went to the door. There was an old prospector getting water at the spring. But he wasn't the typical desert rat. I am always interested in character classification, and the man puzzled me. I came to the conclusion he'd been a sailor.

So I got out, shook hands, and passed the time of day. He was interested in my camp wagon, and I took him in, sat him down and smoked for a spell. Then I asked him if he hadn't been a sailor.

I can still see the queer pucker that came into his eyes as he nodded.

Now sailors are pretty much inclined to stay with the water. One doesn't often find a typical sailor in the desert. So I asked him why he'd come into the desert.

He explained that he had to get away from rain. When it rained he got the sleeping sickness.

That sounded like a story, so I made it a point to draw him out. It came, a bit at a time, starting with the Sahara dust that painted the rigging of the ship after the storm, and winding up with the sleeping sickness that came back whenever he smelled the damp of rain-soaked vegetation.

I thought it was one gosh-awful lie, but it was a gripping, entertaining lie, and I thought I could use it. I put it up to him as a business proposition, and within a few minutes held in my possession a document which read in part as follows:

For value received, I hereby sell to Erle Stanley Gardner the story rights covering my adventures in Africa, including the monkey-man, the unwritten language, the ants who watched the gold ledge, the bread that made me ill, the sleeping sickness which comes back every spring and leaves me with memories of my lost sweetheart, *et cetera, et cetera*.

After that I set about taking complete notes of his story. I still thought it was a lie, an awful lie.

Like all stories of real life in the raw it lacked certain connecting incidents. There was no balance to it. It seemed disconnected in places.

Because I intended to make a pure fiction story out of it, I didn't hesitate to fill in these connections. I tried to give it a sweep of unified action, and I took some liberties with the facts as he had given them to me. Yet, in the main, I kept his highlights, and I was faithful to the backgrounds as he had described them.

Because he had just recovered from a recurrence of the sleeping sickness, I started the story as it would have been told to a man who had stumbled onto the sleeping form in the desert. It was a story that "wrote itself." The words just poured from my fingertips to the typewriter. But I was writing it as fiction, and I considered it as such.

Not all of what he told me went into the story. There was some that dealt with intimate matters one doesn't print. There was some that dealt with tribal customs, markings of different tribes, *et cetera, et cetera*. In fact, I rather avoided some of these definite facts. Because I felt the whole thing was fiction, I was rather careful to keep from setting down definite data, using only such as seemed necessary.

Then, after the story had been written and mailed, after I had returned to headquarters, I chanced to get some books dealing with the locality covered in the story, telling of tribal characteristics, racial markings, *et cetera*.

To my surprise, I found that every fact given me by the old prospector was true. I became convinced that his story was, at least, founded on fact.

And so I consider "Rain Magic" the most remarkable story I ever had anything to do with. I'm sorry I colored it up with fiction of my own invention. I wish I'd left it as it was, regardless of lack of connective incident and consistent motivation.

Somewhere in the shifting sands of the California desert is an old prospector, hiding from the rain, digging for gold, cherishing lost memories. His sun-puckered eyes have seen sights that few men have seen. His life has been a tragedy so weird, so bizarre that it challenges credulity. Yet of him it can be said, "He has lived."

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER.

HELP! HELP!

OUR offer of an original pen and ink drawing of one of our heading illustrations for ten Your Choice coupons has swamped us completely. The coupons have come pouring in at a rate far heavier than we anticipated—so heavily that our supply of drawings has been exhausted.

In making this offer we stipulated that the drawings would be given *while they lasted*, but we do not want any one to be disappointed. Therefore we are having made a full size engraving of one of the best headings, artistically printed and mounted on attractive stock, and will send one of these in place of the original drawings. These engravings will really be more finished and frameable than the original drawings.

It will take a little while to secure these engravings, so if your copy does not come immediately please be patient; we have a record of your coupons and will send your picture at the earliest possible moment.

"If you are satisfied tell others," is an excellent slogan for magazine readers—for the more readers that are won to ARGOSY the better magazine we

can give you. Mr. Rider has the right idea:

New Orleans, La.

I am very happy to see the ARGOSY getting back to normal. By that I mean back to what it was before the changes were made in it last April.

Please do not change the ARGOSY. Do not experiment with it; leave it as it is and has been since it was combined with the *All-Story Weekly*.

I started reading the *All-Story Weekly* two or three months before the combine with the ARGOSY was made and have been reading it ever since.

All of your writers are good, but I will be glad when John Wilstach wears the I out on his typewriter and gives us a story in the third person.

I wish you would publish Means stories in the ARGOSY again, as they are mine and my family's favorite short stories.

Don Waters is another writer I would like to hear from.

I hope we will soon have stories by Coe, Waters, Ivers, Burroughs, Holden, and Footner.

I have made many an ARGOSY fan since I have been one, as I am a druggist and sell magazines in my store. Whenever a customer wants a magazine and doesn't know exactly what they want I recommend ARGOSY. Long may the old boat float!

J. C. RIDER.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....
because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....



Looking Ahead!

Of late we have introduced to the pages of Argosy several authors who have won for themselves sterling reputations in other publications. In the next issue we add to this list another, a novelist of international reputation and with millions of readers. It is with pleasure that we welcome

TALBOT MUNDY

with

WHEN TRAILS WERE NEW

In this novel Mr. Mundy gives us a graphic tale of the days of the Black Hawk War—days when the pioneers were carrying forward the frontier—days when Abe Lincoln and Jeff Davis were serving together to stop the red depredations. It is truly an epic tale of this phase of American frontier history—a story well fitted to introduce Talbot Mundy to an audience which is to hear much more of him.

DON'T MISS IT!

In the ISSUE OF OCTOBER 27th

USELESS

by F. V. W. MASON

will be the complete novelette in this issue. In this swift-moving novelette the author of "Brothers in Red" gives us another story of the Great War—this time on the Near East front. A war aviation story this, with action and thrills aplenty.

THE FEATURE SHORT STORY *for this issue will be*

ONCE IN A LIFETIME by Robert Terry Shannon

A great short story is this—with a surprise and a thrill you will remember.

ARGOSY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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Davenport, rocker and wing chair have comfortable side wings. The delightful curved backs invite lazy lounging. The sturdy hardwood frames are in rich Brown Mahogany finish. You will love the way the serviceable blue and taupe Figured Velour is tailored over the backs, wings and trim seats—so smooth and snug. For contrast there is plain Blue Velour over the roll arms and outside ends. Inner construction—9 coil springs in the seat of each chair, 18 coil springs in seat of Davenport, together with high quality, sanitary, interior upholstering materials, thickly padded backs, seats and side wings—guarantees perfect comfort and long wear.

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